

Sociological Perspectives of Gangs Throughout History

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## Dedication

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## Abstract of Thesis

### Sociological Perspectives of Gangs Throughout History

When one pictures a gang, the image that comes to mind is a group of young, minority males in an urban community. They commit acts of violence, murder and theft. The definition of a gang is one that terrorizes the streets of America and baffles police departments from coast to coast. Conversely, from a sociologist's perspective, the definition of a gang is not that simple. The issues of theory, membership, labels and crime patterns all merge to one confusing and constantly altering perception. This paper will address these issues by exploring historical sociological perceptions of gangs beginning with the Fredrick Thrasher's study of Chicago gangs in 1927. Major sociological studies of their era will be addressed and dissected, ending with contemporary ethnographic research and the changing perception of gangs. Finally, the paper will illuminate how ex-gang members perceive themselves as delinquent gang members.

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## **Introduction**

Gangs have been entwined within American culture for centuries. Constantly battling against law enforcement and society, gangs have terrorized the streets of urban ghettos. Cited as the most comprehensive sociological study of street gangs in Chicago, Fredrick Thrasher introduced many to the issue of gangs. Thrasher accurately detailed the emergence and separation of gangs, the definition of a gang and theoretical explanations for gang deviance. Thrasher overlooked issues of the gang such as gender and racial participation, political and sociological impacts on the neighborhood in which gangs form and the gang's economic resources.

Continuing research after Thrasher, up until the 1960s, more sociological perceptions of gangs included points that Thrasher ignored. Constantly contradicting one another, sociologists have found different reasons for the gang phenomenon while the ecological studies of cities in which gangs emerge have continued to stay the same.

The clash between sociological researches has continued into contemporary research in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The concept of gangs began to cater to law enforcement's view of the "super-gang" that are purely deviant and violent in nature have created fear in American cities. The media only fuels the fire of this debate. Theoretical explanations of gangs continued to follow historical foundations but the study of female gangs, drug trafficking as an economic resource and deviant activities have changed.

The current review will encompass research from the earliest study of youth gangs by Fredrick Thrasher to the most contemporary ethological study by Sudhir Venkatesh's and the Black Disciples in Chicago. Cross-cultural and global gangs will not be dissected here, although they contribute greatly to the study of gangs. The review will analyze street gangs, defined most accurately as adolescences that hang around, usually in the open and excludes motorcycle gangs, prison gangs and skinheads (Klein, 1995, 22). The comparison between historical and contemporary research will cover the definition of gangs, theoretical explanations of gangs, the formation and separation of gangs, racial, ethnic and gender composition of gangs, modes of

material and financial accumulation, deviant behavior and the organization and community's response to gangs.

The gang members discussed in the second section comprise of Stanley Tookie Williams, Colton Simpson, Monster Kody Scott, Reymundo Sanchez, Luis Rodriquez and Bill Lee. Each individual was a gang member during their adolescence. Eventually realizing the harm and danger of their complicated lives, all men decided to leave the gang, willingly or unwillingly, and wrote about their adventures. The memoirs encompass what a gang is, how gangs are formed and disbanded, gang membership and how the gang is organized within their community. The section will compare historical and contemporary research with the six ex-gang member memoirs, noting how accurate or inaccurate most sociological research has come to the true process of gangs.

## Section One

### Chapter One – Sociological Perceptions of Gangs

In the 1920s, gangs emerged in the field of sociology. Sociologists in Chicago initiated research of urbanization and industrialization only to find the reoccurrence of gangs. This phenomenon became widely published and sociologists were drawn to study gangs. The empirical work of Robert Park was the first to document and describe immigration of rural peoples into the urban chaos created a “profound revolution in the psychology of the peasant” (as cited in Hagedorn, 2008, pg 4). The “revolution” Park discusses was seen as a result of social disorganization as formal institutions lost power and the peasant became resocialized into an industrial order. The social disorganization often tempted the immigrants’ children to form groups, later studied by Fredrick Thrasher and labeled as “street-corner gangs” (Thrasher, 1927). This was the dawn of the study of gangs, unclearly defined groups of youth who lacked access to main society.

The unclearly defined groups of youth caused a problem for researchers, policy makers, and law enforcement agencies agreeing on a common definition of a gang. It is critical to know how gangs are structured and their function in American society in order to understand gangs and their group process. Law enforcement defines gangs to be a criminal conspiracy while sociologists believe gangs to be a result of a disorganized society. The most widely used definition of a gang is that of Malcolm Klein (1971) who states that gangs are:

Any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost always with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies.



A more contemporary definition of a gang by Walter B. Miller has had the most significant influence in criminalizing gangs. Miller (as cited in Scarpitti, Nielsen & Miller, 2009) states that gangs are:

A self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interest with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose or purposes which generally include the conduct of illegal activity and control over particular territory or type of enterprise.

While both of these commonly used definitions differ, they share significant commonalities that should be addressed. The basic foundations of a gang are adolescent peers who form a group with a group name and have identifiable leadership. From there, the individual group hierarchies and illegal activities grow vague and unclear. Several sociologists define gangs as turf, fighting or gain-oriented, while others define them by fighting or money-making (Weisel, 2002). Early work attempts to address gangs by purely delinquent activities or economic gain, which can easily go hand-in-hand, while contemporary definitions have become vaguer. Throughout the literature, one thing has grown apparent; defining gangs based on activities alone is insufficient.

Fredrick Thrasher, one of the first sociologists to study gangs in Chicago, gave gangs a cultural and ecological framework. He sought to explain gang transmission as part of a process of collective behavior. These areas were characterized by (1) deteriorating neighborhoods; (2) shifting populations; and (3) mobility and disorganization of the slum. To be precise, Thrasher (1927, 37) viewed gangs as:

The spontaneous effort of boys to create a society for themselves where none adequate to their needs exists. What boys get out of such association that they do not get otherwise under the conditions that adult society imposes is the thrill and zest of participation in common interest, more especially in corporate action, in hunting, capture, conflict, flight and escape.

This definition sharply conflicts with Klein and Miller's previous definitions. Thrasher believed that gangs were interstitial groups originally formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict. He believed that one needs to understand not only specific communities but the specific formation processes the gang undergoes as well. Klein and Miller's definition claims that violent and law-breaking conduct is typical of all gangs, however, makes no effort to mention the communities the gangs feed off of or the type of internal group process the gang experiences. In this sense, Klein and Miller's definition has done nothing more than to feed the media and police with stereotypes.

Sociologists such as Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin defined types of gangs rather than try to apply a standard definition to gangs. The sociologists believed gangs were, by definition, delinquent in nature. From this assumption, Cloward and Ohlin identified three types of gangs; criminal, violent and retreatist. Criminal gangs resulted from a well-integrated, stable slum with a criminal opportunity structure and were recruiting grounds for adult criminal organizations. Violent gangs existed in unstable slum areas whose residents could not find organized criminal opportunity which resulted in violence. Finally, retreatist gangs were drug-using youths who engaged in criminal activity for fun because of a badly disorganized community where nothing but demoralization could be found (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). The delinquent activities of these youth are prominently displayed within each type of gang.

The work of Albert Cohen provided a foundation to the knowledge of juvenile gangs for sociologists in the 1950s. His definition of a "delinquent gang" was one that is involved in short-run hedonism with little interest in long-run goals (Cohen, 1955, 31). There is strong group autonomy, not to be confused with individual autonomy, meaning the gang is the only autonomous figure. Cohen's definition seems suffice defining the group's focus and cohesion and straying from specific delinquent activities.

In 1958, after conducting an extensive study on street-corner gangs in Chicago, James Short and Fred Strodbeck developed an extensive definition of a gang. The researchers sought

explanations for the boys' behavior in terms of the culture and social structure of larger society or of lower class culture, while ignoring personality variables and focusing on the gang as a group.

Focusing on the “social and cultural dynamics of the interpersonal violence that is currently undermining the quality of life” of urban neighborhoods, the ethnographic study of Elijah Anderson is the most compelling contemporary study of gangs (1999, 10). Anderson begins by defining his theory as the “code of the street” as set of prescriptions and proscriptions, or informal rules, of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations, especially violence, among young men and women. This code emerges where the influence of the police ends and personal responsibility for one's safety is felt to begin, resulting in a kind of revenge for wrong doings. While Anderson never actually defines the term “gang”, he applies the code to these young men who are forced to live in the inner-city. In service to this ethic, repeated displays of “nerve” and “heart” build or reinforce a credible reputation for vengeance that works to deter aggression and disrespect, which are sources of great anxiety on the inner-city street. Essentially, physical and psychological control is needed in order to survive on the streets and forming groups and following a code is the only way these individuals know how to survive.

Continuing with contemporary studies of gangs, Martin Sanchez-Jankowski discussed the analysis of the gangs as an organization. He systematically observed the internal dynamics and structure of gangs and how they operated within society. Sanchez-Jankowski's definition followed three basic rules; gangs are organized but are organized around an intense competition for and conflict over the scarce resources that exist in the area; gangs are comprised as an alternative social order; and gangs emerge as an organizational response – but not the only one – seeking to improve the competitive advantage of its members in obtaining an increase in material resources (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991, 23). The study of gangs as an organization is profound because this issue is one in which historical sociologists tended to ignore.

The most interesting piece of contemporary ethnographic research conducted thus far was by Sudhir Venkatesh, a graduate student at the University of Chicago. Venkatesh was given the opportunity to survey low income minorities at the Robert Taylor Homes projects in Chicago for his dissertation. Venkatesh aimed in one direction, to figure out if “growing up as a poor kid in a housing project, for instance, lead to worse educational and job outcomes than if a similarly poor kid grew up outside the projects” (2008, 5). Venkatesh entered the housing projects with a survey and a notebook only to encounter J.T., a notorious gang leader. The young graduate student soon finds himself entangled in the entire organization, interviewing gang members and witnessing drive-by shootings. Most of the information Venkatesh gathers from J.T. is how J.T. views himself, the gang, the community and his gang members; however, the most interesting definition of a gang is applied in this piece of work. According to J.T., the gang was a huge part of the community and everything the gang did was for the community’s benefit. From an outsider’s point of view, this was skewed, but to J.T. and his members who rationalized their organization, they were doing more good than harm. Venkatesh developed a definition of the gang he studied in Chicago as an organization with a hierarchy, who mostly hung on street corners, sold drugs, gambled, talked about women and played sports. Criminal activity was involved and committed as a collective group and the community is the gang’s biggest ally and enemy. Venkatesh incorporated the community in his definition as both helping keep the gang alive as well as dismantling it. This was the first definition of a gang to incorporate the community in which the gang feeds off of.

Malcolm Klein also provides a distinct definition of a gang in his contemporary study. Klein believes that a distinct definition of a gang is pointless, and instead provides a depiction of street gangs focusing on three central issues: gang proliferation, the gang-drug connection, and the place of group process in gang control (1995). The most interesting perspective Klein takes on the definition of a gang is that it is a *street* gang. Klein excludes motorcycle gangs, prison gangs and skinheads. Most of the gangs that researchers write about focus on the adolescent factor that

most members are very young and are depicted as hanging around, usually in the open. After Klein narrows his focus on to street gangs, he talks about how they are “pointless” and “aimless” with no long-term goals (1995, 22). Finally, he includes in his definition the most important factor that most researchers do not account for: race.

The most clear-cut definition of a gang is given by John Hagedorn as a group that “mints” power for the otherwise powerless from their control of small urban spaces: street corners, slums, playgrounds, parks, schools, prison dormitories, even garbage dumps” (2008, 2). The poor youth who form gangs lack legitimate resources and the informal special monopolies, if successfully defended and consolidated, provide some form of entrepreneurial opportunity as well as status, reputation and prestige within the community. Hagedorn’s definition focuses primarily around the territorial function of the gang. In one sense, this is a rational concept when comparing the current definition to other unclear and racially profiled definitions.

John Hagedorn’s study of Milwaukee gangs during the early 1980s shifts in comparison to his most recent definition. Hagedorn focused a lot of attention on the flaws of Miller, Klein and Thrasher’s definition of gangs. Hagedorn states that gangs are, “a friendship group of adolescents who share common interests, with a more or less clearly defined territory, in which most of the members live... defending one another, the territory and the gang name...their families tend to live conventional lives; although some may be troubled, this is by no means true for all of them” (1988, 5). Hagedorn also claims that one must recognize that the media, law enforcement and policy makers have developed a “super-gang” that commits violent acts and terrorize the streets of America. Instead, stemming from his last definition, gangs are more about gaining a profit in the current moment rather than forming groups for the sole purpose of terrorizing citizens.

Scott H. Decker and Barrik Van Winkle produced a separate definition of a gang before the start of their study. They believed that “not all of the illegal group activity of young people has a similar motivation or character; it is useful to have a less rigid definition of gangs...In this way, the term can capture variations across time, cities, ethnic, and age groups” (Decker & Van

Winkle, 1996, 3). The sociologists believed that location, ethnicity and age all played important factors in what made up a gang and these factors should be considered when defining a gang. On the other hand, Ronald Huff argues against Decker and Van Winkles definition because it is vague and can lead to over identification or denial that gangs exist at all (1991).

Unfortunately, there is no reliable way to account for how many gangs exist or a standard definition of a gang. While some sociologists believe that we should not define a gang or the definition should be vague lest we lost its essential variety. However, having too much variety in the definition and concept of the gang will hinder law enforcement's fight against gangs and cause researchers to talk right past one another, which they currently do now, and using the word to freely and out of context. The definition of gangs have changed for various reasons including immigration demographic during different time eras and how the research was conducted such as surveys, participant observation and ethnographic research.

## Chapter Two - Theoretical Explanations of Gangs

When examining theories of crime and delinquency, it is essential to determine which behaviors are to be included in the operational definition of delinquency. Also, measuring those behaviors must be taken into account. Sociologists have tried to discuss theoretical explanations of gangs in both qualitative and quantitative measures. While one may not trump the other, there are clear differences in how a researcher gathers their information and processes it into theory. The qualitative and quantitative studies resulted in three major theoretical paradigms of juvenile delinquency and gang research. The three theoretical paradigms are strain theory, control theory and subculture theory.

In the 1960s strain theory made its first appearance in gang research, later resurfaced in the 1980s and 1990s in the form of underclass theory. Strain theory suggests that the difference between economic opportunity and individual aspirations is the root of criminal activity (Weisel, 2002). The problem between economic opportunity and individual aspirations leads to frustration and feelings of deprivation. Robert K. Merton's 1938 article on anomie was the first to suggest this problem. Merton states that there is an "intense pressure for deviation" sometimes through illegitimate or illegal means (Kubrin, Stucky & Krohn, 2009). Merton argued that a society with an open-class system which indoctrinates all groups with high aspirations for success, but denies equal opportunity for achievement of these aspirations, generates anomie among those who are disadvantaged in the struggle for success. Both Sanchez-Jankowski and Anderson use Merton's theory to describe gangs associated with their ethnographic research. Particularly, Anderson described the group of individuals he studied as "ghetto poor" and believed that simply living in an environment such as this one places young people at special risk of falling victim to aggressive behavior (1999, 32).

The theory of gangs offered by Sanchez-Jankowski (1991) in his study is composed of three elements: the kind of individuals who become gang members, the types of organizations they become members of, and the linkages of their organizations to the broader community. His

theory is not that gangs emerge as a result of disorganization or the desire to find order and safety, but as a consequence of a particular type of social order associated with low-income neighborhoods in American society. In order to understand the gang phenomenon and gang behavior, it is necessary not only to understand the deprived socioeconomic conditions from which gang members come but to go beyond those conditions and focus on the dynamics between individuals in gangs, gang organizations, and the institutions of the outside world.

Following Merton's theory, Albert Cohen studied individual characteristics to elaborate on strain theory. Cohen discusses the emergence of "the delinquent subculture" in terms of status problems. Status problems emerge because they cause a discrepancy between culture goals and institutionalized means. Cohen's basis for conceptualizing delinquency as a subculture is from his environmental and demographic findings which consist primarily of young males of the working-class (1955, 36-37). These young males are ill-equipped to succeed in regards to criteria of persons and institutions. The criterion, also known as the "middle-class measuring rod", fails these young working-class males in which they experience loss of status and self-respect (Cohen, 1955, 82-87).

Next, Cloward and Ohlin attempted to add to the foundation of Merton's theory of limited accessibility of legitimate means. Cloward and Ohlin state that delinquent subcultures are formed by lower class youth who have goals and ambitions for improvement blocked by their economic conditions. Essentially, legitimate means to succeed are limited and pressures to succeed are exerted toward deviant behavior. They classified the theory as differential opportunity theory.

Merton, Cohn, and Cloward and Ohlin all blame the universal goals of American society as responsible for problems of adjustment of lower class, thus causing the lower class to become delinquent, especially adolescents. Conversely, strain theory has yet to be empirically verified and the truth is that most youths will eventually mature out of gangs and delinquent behavior



while not changing their economic status. Strain theory cannot provide an explanation for this phenomenon.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, control theories became more common in the study of gangs and juvenile delinquency. Control theory consists of two basic forms: individual or personal control and social control (Kubrin, Stucky & Krohn, 2009). Personal control is described as the idea that self-concept is one's image of one's value to society or to others. Personal control is used to avoid delinquent behavior; however, sometimes the pull to delinquent behavior can overpower personal control in forms of unemployment, deviant friends, tension and frustration. Conversely, social control suggests that individuals engage in delinquent behavior because of weakened social bonds with family, school, community or other social structures.

Contemporary research on gangs agrees with control theory. Anderson (1999, 142-149) discusses the gangs in his study with poor personal control. The example of teenage pregnancy is illustrated in Anderson's study. These young men and women have poor personal control and care little about how one perceives them in the greater society, only status and reputation is important in their subculture:

Their outlook on sex and pregnancy, like their outlook on violence, is strongly affected by their perceived options in life, and their sexual behavior follows rules very much shaped by the code of the street. How many notches one has on ones belt is a sign of status and reputation. Casual sex with as many women as possible, impregnating one or more of them and getting them to have his baby brings a boy the ultimate in esteem from his peers and makes him a man.

Anderson (1999, 143) continues to express how personal control is lost with the views of street life:

This street culture is characterized by support for and encouragement of an alternative lifestyle that appears highly attractive to many adolescents, despite their family

background. Centered on the “fast life” and may include early sexual activity, drug experimentation, and other forms of delinquency.

Continuing the discussion, Anderson (1999, 145) notes that social control is poor as well:

The manufacturing jobs that used to provide opportunities for young people in the inner-city neighborhoods and strongly, although indirectly, supported values of decency and conventionality have largely vanished from the economy, replaced with thousands of low-paying service jobs often located in the suburbs, beyond the reach of poor neighborhoods. Racism, the changing economy, unemployment, and changing social values all affect the people in the community.

The basis of the subculture theory and theories explaining gang formation can be found in the work of Clifford Shaw and Henry H. McKay. These sociologists suggested that the norms of delinquent youth conform to the social norms of the prevailing culture though these norms conflict with those of the larger society. Social disorganization is the foundation of delinquency rather than a casual explanation; economic instability and social pathology lead to conflicting moral values and often resulted in intergenerational transmission of criminality (as cited in Weisel, 2002). Shaw and McKay propose that “in the areas of low rates of delinquents there is more or less uniformity, consistency, and universality of conventional values and attitudes with respect to child care, conformity to law, and related matters; whereas in the high-rate areas systems of competing and conflicting moral values have developed” (1942, 170). The values of middle-class exist and are expressed through institutions and voluntary associations which are “designed to perpetuate and protect these values” (Shaw & McKay, 1942, 171) Lower class children are exposed to distinctly opposite values, in which the differential association theory is proposed. This is a central issue because Shaw and McKay believe delinquency group behavior is formed and maintained over time to be frequent to certain locations.

Walter Miller built onto Shaw and McKay’s theory by arguing that lower class culture has a long established tradition with integrity of its own and this exerts the most direct influence

on gang delinquency. Essentially, Miller states that this lower class culture is to blame in the social order rather than the universal and competitive system of goals and means to achieve these goals. Miller begins his theory with the “female-based households” which create identity problems and are worked out on the street with the gang (1958, 5). Anderson (1999) supports Miller’s theory when he notes the “decent single mother” as part of his study. The “decent single mother” is a mother with children who must work even harder to neutralize the draw of the street and she does so primarily by being strict and by instilling decent values in her children. The “decent single mother” must fight against the streets in taking her sons into the drug culture and taking (dating) her daughters and impregnating them.

While some sociologists use the labeling theory as a theory to explain gang involvement and behavior, the theory lacks empirical explanations about the original cause of delinquent behavior. This means that the delinquent behavior of a gang can be caused by a number of factors. However, the labeling theory does provide an explanation for the secondary and continued deviance that occurs once society has officially labeled a deviant individual. The theory suggests that once a label is given to an individual, the individual is pushed further into the gang subculture and begins to label him or herself as a deviant gang member (Weisel, 2002). Research has shown that labeling an individual has minimal effects on subsequent criminal behavior.

Social disorganization theory refers to the inability of a community to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls. According to the theory socially disorganized communities are ineffective in combating crime. A socially organized community, compared to a disorganized community, has (1) solidarity, or an internal consensus on important norms and values; (2) cohesion, or a strong bond among neighbors; and (3) integration with social interaction occurring on a regular basis (Kubrin, Stucky & Krohn, 2009, 87).

Contemporary research argues that a disorganized community has the same solidarity, cohesion and integration as an organized community. Using the community of the Robert Taylor

Homes projects in Sudhir Venkatesh's study, this community suffered because of the poor economy, drug addiction and public violence. The government neglected the community and the projects formed an "underclass" of urban families struggling to survive with the poor living difficult and virtually separate lives from the mainstream culture (Venkatesh, 2008). While the community struggled, Venkatesh interviewed a few gang members who claimed that they would control the buildings and collect taxes from squatters and prostitutes and kick out addicts and settle fights for tenants. They did this because they believed in the same values and norms as the community; they did not want prostitutes and drug addicts hanging around the building. Essentially, the gang was the police, government and housing authority. While the gang members claimed they did this for their community's safety and comfort, Venkatesh noticed that the gang was ordered to patrol the projects so violence is kept at a minimal in order to obtain more customers. On the other hand, gang members talked about block parties and basketball tournaments that were held on a regular occasion, involving both gang members and members of the community. Even though the parties were hosted by the gang members the members of the community still showed up to support the game and attend the party. All of these factors point towards aspects of a socially organized and disorganized community.

A new theory, organizational theory, is commonly used by sociologists and criminologists to explain gangs. This theory provides an explanation for organizations and the organizations stages of evolution; creation, growth or maturation and decline (Weisel, 2002). The life cycle model can aid in conceptualizing how gangs develop and change over time. The theory is relatively new in regards to researchers incorporating the theory into their studies; however, it properly describes how gangs are created, how they recruit new members and how the gang dissolves over time.

There are numerous claims that sociological literature on gangs offers a number of theories, but a close look at each of these indicates that they are really theories about delinquency not gangs. Historical theories all rely on the assumption that gangs emerge from poverty and

persist because poverty persists. Contemporary theories believe that gangs persist simply because socially disorganized poor communities have developed a culture spawns these deviant behavioral patterns and made it difficult for formal social institutions to institute control. Although these theories can account for the gang as an instrument facilitating delinquency, they are inadequate for understanding: (1) the behavior of individuals in gangs; (2) the behavior of the gang as a collective, and (3) why some gangs persist and thrive while others (or the same gang at another time) decline and die.

### **Chapter Three – The Formation and Separation of Gangs**

To best understand the gang, one must analyze the forces behind individual reasons to become a member of a gang. Joining a gang is not an easy process and factors such as the community, family, socioeconomic status and legitimate institutions must be taken into account.

Thrasher believed that gangs are isolated from mainstream society by both geography and lack of access to legitimate institutional roles such as employment. This isolation contributes to cohesion of group members and helps explain the lack of integration into the economic, educational and social structure of cities and serves to prevent many gang members from giving up their gang affiliations for activities that are more law-abiding (Thrasher, 1927). In essence, Thrasher believed that members of gangs were forced to join and stay within the gang in order to survive in their poor economic environment and forming a gang was one response of immigrant youth to a disorganized community. Because the gang is isolated from mainstream culture, they are forced to create their own set of rules different from other institutions. Order is maintained through informal mechanisms as well, particularly “collective representations” such as symbols, signs and a private language. “Mutual excitation” is then created and promotes behavior among gang members that alone, the members would not normally engage in. Thrasher (1927, 322) also made a startling discovery by noting the importance of subgroups within the gang:

The two-and three-boy relationship is often much more important to the individual boy than his relationship to the gang. In such cases a boy would doubtless forego the gang before he would give up his special pal or pair of pals.

For Thrasher, gangs start out as “play-groups”, defined as a “gang in embryo” (1927, 23). Thrasher believed gangs were unique and represented a variable of experience of groups of immigrant youth adjusting to disorganized life in a new country. While the origin of the gang is spontaneous in nature, some of the groups become integrated through conflict and forms lose structures and hierarchies. Time was the biggest element to Thrasher’s theory of gang formation and disbanding; as time passes, the gangs fade away and are replaced by new ethnic gangs. A

large part of this theory is that gangs can be explained by examining the local community rather than society.

Cohen found that the subculture theory is a good explanation of gang membership. Following Thrasher's idea of the group's private language and culture, Cohen believed that everyone in society wants to be a member in good standing of groups that share the same age, race, sex, belief or value system. Individuals want to be recognized as part of a group and expect the respect of other members of the group that are contingent upon the agreement of the beliefs and norms they share. Sharing the same beliefs and value system, Cohen argues, causes faith and trust in these "reference groups". The "reference group" causes levels of "overt action and of the supporting frame of reference, there are powerful incentives not to deviate from the ways established in our groups" (Cohen, 1955, 58). Signs of membership such as uniforms, insignia and membership cards play a role in the function of group membership as well. Gang membership, according to Cohen, is a process of "mutual exploration" and "joint elaboration" of a new solution (Cohen, 1955, 60). Individuals become increasingly committed but only if, by some visible sign, the other members are similarly committed.

Continuing the discussion of gang membership, Cohen states that culture is continually being created, re-created and modified over time based on individuals who sense in one another similar needs, generated by like circumstances not shared by mainstream society. Once the subculture is established, it may persist as long as it continues to serve the needs of those who join the group. Cohen's theory claims that the group forms as a basis to help individuals within the community who are struggling within the larger society and share the same belief and value system. The gang will only survive as long as these beliefs stand strong over time and the group serves the individual.

Short and Strodbeck fueled their study of gaining knowledge of the "distinct lower class value system" discussed primarily in Miller and Cohen's studies (1965, 43). Since theories developed by Cohen and Miller believe that lower class value systems conflict with middle class

value systems which causes gang formation and membership, Short and Strodbeck pursued this concept in their study. They found that “there are many instances in which middle-status and lower-status persons agree on positive goals, yet middle-status persons have much greater resistance to accepting compromise solution” (Short & Strodbeck, 1965, 43).

Contemporary studies of gangs began to separate from the idea that subculture theory plays a role in the process of gang membership, focusing more on racial segregation. During the study of Milwaukee gangs, Hagedorn found a variety of motivations for forming each gang. Dancing gangs were the most popular among black and Hispanic youth, soon forming into groups who rivaled with one another by having dancing competitions. Other groups formed from friends who liked to “hang-out” and skip school (Hagedorn, 1988, 59). The latter formation of gangs was considered “street-corner gangs” as defined by Thrasher. As Hagedorn states, these gangs were “groups of teenage friends [who] gathered on corners on their blocks and hung out...having nothing to do and not in school, they got high, got into trouble, and fought with other corner groups” (Hagedorn, 1988, 60).

The most interesting result from Hagedorn’s study on gang formation was that many of the gangs in his study had direct roots to Chicago gangs. This is not a conspiracy theory of gangs forming and developing in other cities across the United States, but instead is almost identical in most aspects to the dancing and corner groups described above. During an interview with a gang member who migrated to Milwaukee to escape Chicago describes his move as:

...me and my brother we came from Chicago and my cousin did. Let’s put this to plan before anything ump off anyway ‘cause we know how it was in Chicago. So we just got ourselves together and just named us one group. Then we had just three, and I had another cousin, that make four, because the only reason I’m up here now is just because Chicago too damn rough, too many niggas down. I probably see you one day and you dead the next (Hagedorn, 1988, 61).



The gangs in Milwaukee grew during from 1983 to 1984. Hagedorn's theory behind this expansion is the rival battles that formed between each group whether they were dancing groups, groups of friends or Chicago migrants. The original gang members were in high school and fighting was the "drama" that attracted these young individuals. The "drama" is considered staying out of school, getting high, girls, money and fighting (Hagedorn, 1988, 65). Contrasting other studies, Hagedorn makes a point to differentiate between the black gang and Hispanic gang formation and growth. While blacks were attracted to the "drama" of the gang, Hispanic gangs formed from Mexican-Puerto Rican tensions as well as family tensions. During an interview with Dante, a Latin King, he claims:

It goes way back, way back. If there was a death in the family by a group, then it becomes a family feud, which means just not the guys or the girls, it's the mothers, the aunts, and the uncles, see. It goes and keeps going and that's one of the biggest problems (Hagedorn, 1988, 66).

Changes in immigration, urbanization, ethnicity and poverty all correspond to rapid changes in the composition of city populations and economics. These four factors, when produced together, create conditions that make the formation and growth of gangs more likely. However, economic and population variables alone cannot explain the growth of gangs or gang activities (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Decker and Van Winkle's theory of gang formation is similar to that of Thrasher with respect to ethnicity, immigration and location. They also formed a theory based on gang formation in cities across the United States. The "importation" model emphasizes the role of gang members in other cities coming into new cities and forming "branches" of their gang. The second model, "transmission", views the role of informal factors such as pop-culture and media as the reason for other gangs (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996, 85-86). This theory fits more appropriately in Hagedorn's theory of gang formation in new cities.

There are many levels that impact an individual to join a gang. Past research is summarized to form three reasons an individual joins a gang; (1) natural associations; (2)

subculture of blocked opportunities; and (3) problems in identity construction (Thrasher, 1927; Hagedorn, 1988). Natural association happens when people join gangs as a result of the natural act of associating with each other. They decide to formalize their relationship in an attempt to reduce the fear and anxiety associated with their socially disorganized neighborhoods. Natural association can be seen in Anderson's study in Philadelphia. A subculture of blocked opportunities produces a gang because young males experience persistent problems in gaining employment or legitimate status. As a result, members of poor communities who experience the strain of these blocked opportunities attempt to compensate for socioeconomic deprivation by joining a gang and establishing a subculture. The male population in the housing projects found in Venkatesh's study demonstrated that blocked opportunities pushed the gang together for profit and power. The final gang formation is problems in identity construction. This theory believes that individuals join gangs as part of the developmental process of building an identity or as the result of a breakdown in that process. Low-income families have been blocked from achieving social status through conventional means and join gangs to gain status and self-worth, to rebuild a wounded identity (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Hagedorn, 1988; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965).

Contemporary sociologists believed it necessary for gang research to be comparative on many levels. According to this theory, race and location have significant impacts on members and gang formation. Sanchez-Jankowski was one of the first successful contemporary sociologist to complete this task. First, it was essential to investigate gangs in different cities in order to control for the different socioeconomic and political environments that they operate in. Second, to determine if there was any difference associated with ethnicity, it was imperative to compare gangs composed of different ethnic groups (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991). Because of these steps Sanchez-Jankowski took during his study, the results explain why individuals join gangs on a variety of levels. Sanchez-Jankowski found that individuals join gangs organized around an intense competition for and conflict over the scarce resources that exist in the area seeking to improve the competitive advantage of its members in obtaining an increase in material resources.

According to Sanchez-Jankowski, individuals in the community believe that through the business dealings of the gang or the connections established while in the gang, they will be able to improve the quality of their lives. The improvement that Sanchez-Jankowski talks about is primarily associated to respect, money, status and power. There was certain criterion required for the optimal number of members needed to maintain a gang; (1) the prestige of the gang; (2) the efficiency of its operations; (3) the level of services to its members considered adequate (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991, 30). The act of becoming a member is a two-way negotiation between the individual and the organization. The interaction between these two evaluations will determine the number of members in the gang and the extent to which individuals in the community will become involved in the gang. From the organizations perspective, they must be able to keep the members dependent upon them. In order to do this, the gang must provide members with services which include entertainment, protection, financial assets and material possessions. Much of the gangs success is directly linked to the organizations ability to be financially stable, proficient in planning activities, mobilizing its resources, creating new resources, executing plans successful without interference from rival gangs or law enforcement, and controlling its territory and market (Sanchez- Jankowski, 1991, 34). The gang must be flexible in its relationships with the individual members, making sure to meet each of the members needs. On the other hand, the gang must also impose some degree of control but this is a fine line. The gang cannot control its members to any harsh extent, but allow freedom to pursue personal and economic goals. When the gang fails to allow freedom, members will quit the organization and the gang will become ineffectual or dissolve over time. The gang can make the members feel obligated to serve the gang through (1) interest incentives, where the individual member feels he receives some type of return for his cooperation; (2) moral incentives, where the individual believes that his participation in the organization is an agreement between he and the other members, and that as long as he continues to be a member, he must uphold his side of the agreement; and (3) organizational rules, where

obedience occurs as a result of the members understanding and accepting a set of rules as being necessary for internal order, or through fear of punishment (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991, 34).

The decision to join the gang rests on the individual in most cases. Sanchez-Jankowski found that the individual decision to become a member is determined by several issues. First, the individual seeks gang membership in order to identify with other males because they lack male figures in their life. Next, securing money for the individual's future was a major issue. Most young men believed the gang could provide financial security by providing them or their families with money in times of emergency. Some believe that joining a gang would reduce the risk of personal injury associated with their business ventures and that these business ventures could eventually help them with a legitimate job in the future. Another reason is that gangs provide drugs and alcohol for recreation and fun. Finally, the individual reasons that push for gang membership include protective group identity, commitment to their community and the resistance to live with parents after a certain age (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991, 39-47). Sanchez-Jankowski also found reasons why an individual would not join a gang. These included individuals who found no personal advantages in participating in gang activities, individuals who saw serious disadvantages to participating in gang activity and the gang's response to individuals. The gang will not allow individuals into their group if they are poor fighters, cannot be trusted or controlled or if the gang does not wish to take on new members at the time.

Along the same lines of Sanchez-Jankowski, Maxson *et al.* conducted a study to measure the differences between young gang males and young non-gang males and found that it was the individuals' choice. The results proved that "individual attitudes and activities" were the main cause as to gang membership. Gang males perceived stressors as blocked opportunities for success, therefore joining a gang as an alternative form of success. Non-gang males were more likely to work around stressors and handle issues differently than gang males (Maxson, Whitlock & Klein, 1998, 76). Non-gang males also responded with higher self-concepts, religious affiliation and a positive outlook towards a future. Gang males were the exact opposite, struggling

within the community with no ties to religion or ideas about future success. The study summarizes these results as “individual attitudes” for reasons joining a gang.

Similar to Miller’s theory of lower class culture, Elijah Anderson defines the crowded cities of poor minorities as the “ghetto poor” (1999, 27-32). The “ghetto poor” communities lack jobs that pay a living wage, limited basic public services (police response in emergencies, building maintenance, trash pickup, lighting, and other services that middle-class whites take for granted) stigma of race, the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and absence of hope for the future. All of this mixed into one issue, simply living in an environment such as this places young people at special risk of falling victim to gang membership (Anderson, 1999, 32). While this explains why individuals join gangs, Anderson noticed that not all families in this “ghetto poor” community were the same. There were two orientations, the “decent” and “street-oriented” family, who organize the community socially. The way these two families coexist and interact has important consequences for its residents, mainly the young boys and girls growing up in the community. Families who are “street-oriented” do not properly watch their children or intercede when they know their child is misbehaving. The “street-oriented” family lets the child hang out with who he, drop out of school, use and sell drugs, and live at home without any consequences. On the other hand, the “decent” family cares about all these issues. The family is aware of what happens on the street and tries to persuade their child away from the bad influences. Even children, whose homes are considered “decent”, reflect such values must be able to handle themselves in a street-oriented environment. While the “decent” family that is committed to middle-class values and bonds with outside institutions such as church and school are not always successful in keeping their children out of harm’s way.

The study of Chicago’s Black Gangster Disciples revealed that individuals in this area joined the gang for different reasons. Venkatesh interviewed several gang members and noticed one interesting trend; most of them had opportunities for success but failed and returned to the community. One of the leaders, J.T., attended college on an athletic scholarship and graduated.

He found a job in a textile corporation in Chicago making a decent salary. When he began to see white men advance above him, he assumed it was because he was black and after two years quit the corporation to return to the projects and live with his mother. Similar stories were told to Venkatesh and when he mentioned that everyone must start at the bottom and work their way to the top, J.T. replied “so you want me to take pride in a job and you’re only paying me minimum wage?” (2008, 28). While the chances for success are there, what made these young men come back to the community and join the gang? There was no economic advantage because gang members made less than minimum wage between selling drugs and taxing the members in the community for their services. The importance of wealth, status, power and women, theorized by other sociologists, caused other young men to join the gang, why were these important factors lacking in this situation? Many members claimed they were helping their community and that was their sole incentive for gang membership. However, Venkatesh noticed that the gang did more harm than good for their community. This is a very similar finding in Sanchez-Jankowski’s study relating to the community and the gang. Members believe that they are helping their community and that joining a gang is similar to a rite of passage within the community.

Following the same lines of the gang and the community, Decker and Van Winkle asked gang members why they joined a gang and found that most of them responded that they grew up in the same neighborhood. These individuals said their gang evolved from playgroups into a more serious and formal association, similar to what Thrasher described as gang formation in Chicago (as cited in Decker & Van Winkle, 1996, 65). The process of joining a gang was described by two associations. First, there are a series of “pulls” that attract individuals to join the gang. This pull was the opportunity to make money, to increase one’s status in the neighborhood, or both. Second, there are a series of “pushes” described by gang members. The “pushes” include a perceived need for protection because of the threat they were under from rival gangs (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996, 65). The study summarized four specific reasons for joining a gang; (1) protection, (2) the prompting of friends and/or relatives, (3) the desire to make money through

drug sales and other illegal activities, and (4) the status associated with being a gang member (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996, 65). The final reason to join a gang, although not as important as the others described above, is the opportunity to impress girls through increased status.

Research on gang membership relies heavily on several factors. Each individual gang member has his own reason for joining the gang. When combined, there are several issues that stand out among the rest. These issues include low self-concept, admitted involvement in violence, defiance of parents, deficits in adult contacts, social disabilities, poor school performance, limited skills and interests, poor impulse control, early conduct disorder, early onset of delinquency and perceptions of barriers to jobs and other opportunities (Klein, 1995, 80). Issues such as location, ethnicity and poverty cannot be ignored as well. These issues all join together and “push” or “pull” an individual into gang membership as the only way to survive in their environment as Decker and Van Winkle described perfectly.

## Chapter Four – Racial, Ethnic and Gender Composition

The central factors to include when attempting to understand the type of individuals who are gang members are location, ethnicity, gender and age. Sociological research in the 1940s to the 1960s was based primarily in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Gangs in the 1920s for sociologists like Thrasher consisted of youthful European immigrants jammed into crowded cities. By his own definition, Thrasher stated that “the gang is an interstitial group, originally formed spontaneously, then integrated through conflict” (1927, 46). The term “interstitial” meant gangs who were located in the crowded slums surrounding central business districts. Today, the ethnicity of gangs might have changed but the location did not. As immigrant groups moved out of the slums, new immigrants moved in. The chain of gang formation and disbanding never stopped, but their ethnicities changed as each old group of immigrants moved out and new groups moved in.

Perceived opportunities of success, called “frames of references”, was the theory that Cohen followed in his study of delinquent boys. Every person has a “point of view” in a situation. While the situation might stay the same, Cohen argues, the person’s response to the situation will always differ. This is what causes gang membership according to Cohen. Cohen (1955, 53) states that:

The facts never simply stare us in the face. We see them always through a glass, and the glass consists of the interests, preconceptions, stereotypes and values we bring to the situation. This glass is our “frame of reference”. What is a “barrier” and what an “opportunity”, what is a “reward” and what a “punishment”, what is a “loss” and what a “gain” depends upon our goals and aspirations...

Essentially, Cohen believed that individuals will act upon these “frame of references” and this must be accounted for when regarding who gang members are and why they form gangs. Gangs are formed because individuals with similar “frame of references” will form together in the emergence of new cultural forms.



The research conducted by William Chambliss was one of the most interesting comparisons of white gangs with a different socioeconomic status. Through participant observation, Chambliss was able to recognize and tag along with two separate gangs. The first gang, “the saints” as Chambliss called them, composed of eight boys from white upper-middle class families. These boys were active in after school activities, enrolled in pre-college programs and received good grades (Chambliss, 1978). The second group of boys, called “the roughnecks”, composed of six lower-class white boys with poor grades and lack of attendance in high school. Both of the gangs were involved in delinquent behavior and attended the same high school. Interestingly, Chambliss found that “the saints” and “the roughnecks” were involved in about the same delinquent activities but the community and local police department viewed the gangs differently. Why was this happening? As Chambliss sought to find the answer, it was quite clear. Lower-class boys were treated differently than the upper-middle class boys. Because of their socioeconomic status, the boys in each gang perceived opportunities for success, and encounters with police officers and community members differently. As an outcome, most if not all of the members in “the saints” went on to college and eventually held successful jobs with positions of power. On the other hand, “the roughnecks” found it harder to succeed after high school. A few members were sent to jail at one point and most did not attend college.

The most concrete definition of gang members is told in Klein’s most recent book on American street gangs. Klein believes that gangs are “young, usually between the ages of 12 and 30 and averaging probably around 20 years of age...they are primarily male; various estimates of female proportions range from zero to 30 percent....most gangs – not all – are composed of homogeneous racial and ethnic minorities...principally they are Hispanic or black with an increase recently in Asian and other groups” (Klein, 1995, 29). Klein continues his composition of gang members as territorial and criminal activities versatile. Their duration can range from a few months to decades of self-regeneration. The definition does not encompass socioeconomic

status as prior research included this to be a major issue of who gang members are. More contemporary research focuses on individual characteristics.

Discussing gang members, there must be a distinction between the types of members. This was found to be a parallel result in most contemporary work. Klein labeled the two types of gang members as “core” members and “fringe” members (1995, 59). The “core” members consisted of half of the gang and are considerably more involved in gang crime, had a considerable amount of respect and loyalty for the gang and were consistent in attending meetings or gang events. On the other hand, “fringe” members were loosely associated with the gang, did not attend or were not allowed to attend certain events or meetings and had different demographic or sociological factors than “core” members. These sociological factors consisted of age, family, status, economic level, parents’ education and immigrant status. “Core” members also had more character deficits such as “lower measured IQ, greater impulsiveness, fewer social skills and more need for group affiliations (dependent upon their peers in the gang)” (Klein, 1995, 60). Anderson found that “core” members were from the “street-oriented” families, while “fringe” members were from the “decent” families. Youths who were from “street-oriented” families were much more inclined to be violent, delinquent and predatory. The youths who were from “decent” families were taught by their parents to be like the “street-oriented” youths but only to survive on the streets (Anderson, 1999). Venkatesh found that there were different “breeds” of members. The first were called the “jailhouse niggers”. These members were devoted to building solidarity within the gang and staying together in times of arrest, death, or gang wars. These members learned in prison that you cannot survive unless you form alliances and loyalties. The second group of members are the “operators” and viewed the gang as a commercial enterprise. One of the older gang members stated in an interview that you could tell the difference between the “jailhouse niggers” and the “operators” because the “ones from jail are here for life...” while the others are just using the gang to make a profit or survive on the streets (Venkatesh, 2008).

Throughout Sanchez-Jankowski's study of gang members, he found one personality trait to be predominant in the organization. Sanchez-Jankowski calls this individual the "defiant individualist" (1991, 28). The defiant individualist is a group of traits structured in a way to constitute a psychological system and contains seven attributes.

1. **Competitiveness:** competitive attitude and physical aggression which forms from the lack of resources in the low-income community.
2. **Mistrust or Wariness:** competitiveness is the initiator of this trait. Lecturing members about trusting no one will cause mistrust but it is nurtured by the competition individuals engage in as they interact with others in the community.
3. **Self-reliance:** with few resources in the family or the community, individuals learn that they must rely on themselves. Regardless if the family is dependent upon public assistance, the individual must rely on themselves because public assistance is not sufficient in most cases to meet the needs of its recipients.
4. **Social isolation:** the fourth trait is influenced by the third trait, self-reliance. Since self-reliance is valued and trust is something that cannot be taken for granted, individuals become less emotionally attached to others.
5. **Survival Instinct:** life in low-income neighborhoods is quite competitive for limited resources that exist within them.
6. **Social Darwinist Worldview:** formal view of the world is developed as the young person in the low-income neighborhood compares his or her environment with that of the outside world. They see that competitiveness, illegality and predatory behavior are all operative in the larger society. When they compare to the outside world, they see similarities and believe this is ok to act like this.
7. **Defiant Air:** the one the public sees the most. The desire to be successful and have the good life gives rise to this trait. Individuals clear idea of what they want and what

they do not want, and their defiance of those who try to prohibit or inhibit their attempts to realize it (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991, 23-27).

In essence, Sanchez-Jankowski believes the goal is to fight, to survive, and to overcome life within the community. While these seven traits are not exclusive to one type of person, Sanchez-Jankowski makes clear that these traits can form in a variety of ways and not as structured as told in his study. Also, variations in the defiant individual are linked to ethnicity and location, proving that the foundation of this study is correct.

Similar to Klein's definition of gang members, Decker and Van Winkle found that their study consisted of primarily young African American males, with an average age of 17 years old (1996, 57). The research consisted of four white subjects and seven females. The research focused on race as an important element of the composition of gangs. The growth of the underclass, especially in predominantly minority neighborhoods, is clearly related to the high numbers of minority gang members. The racial composition of gangs confirms the strong community. Because members are drawn from the community in which they live, it is essential to notice that these neighborhoods that experience racial segregation produce a majority of gangs of similar race and ethnicity. Decker and Van Winkle believe that this is why most gangs are comprised of mainly Hispanic or black males. Finally, Decker and Van Winkle expand on the roles of female gang membership, stating that this could be a sign of gang formalization. The study looked at women who were members of gangs dominated by males and women who formed their own gang, outside of male domination. In sum, the study found few differences between the roles and activities of women regardless of the type of gang they were associated with (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996, 82). Whether the women joined a gang to follow their boyfriends, serve the needs of male gangs, or to have their own association outside of the male gangs, the presence of female gangs was not atypical in this study.

More recent research reveals a different side of the female gang world. Research found that girls had clearly defined membership and were capable of extreme violence. Regardless of the structure of delinquency, the girls shared the same fate as the boys in the gang world; criminally involved, susceptible to victimization, and damaging their adult careers. Girls were just as self-destructive and antisocial as boys (Klein, 1995, 66). They were typically younger than their male counterpart but shared similar demographic profiles such as family structure, socioeconomic status and reasons for joining the gang. Girl gangs emerge for the same kinds of social structural reasons that male gangs do; institutional disorganization of the inner city, family, school, health and employment issues. While their delinquency patterns were typically lower than the male gangs, they still participated in minor offenses such as drinking, casual sex, theft, property crimes, violence and joy riding. The most common stereotype of girl gangs is that they are initiated into male gangs by ways of sexual intercourse and are only sexual partners to male gang members as well as a strategy during gang warfare to lure rival gang members into their territory. This stereotype tends to be blown way out of proportion and female gangs are not created to solely serve the needs of male gang members. Klein is specifically arguing against the results of Decker and Van Winkle who found that females join the gang to follow boyfriends or to help capture rival gang members.

Not dissimilar to the boys, female gangs join to gain respect, and be recognized as capable of setting or maintaining a certain standard. From participant observation, Anderson sees that girls are similar to young men by using certain posturing to represent dominance, abusive language and the ready use of violence to settle disputes (1999, 64). While some of the conflicts over turf and status exist, similar to the boys, the majority of the disputes seem to be rooted in assessments of beauty, competition over boyfriends and attempts to regulate other people's knowledge and opinions of a girl's behavior or that of someone close to her, including friends, siblings, and parents (trash talking). Similar to boy gangs, jealousy over sexual partners also becomes an issue within girl gangs.

Early gang research did not study the involvement of women in street gangs. While women participated in formal meetings, they were not present at any other meetings or activities. The women were excluded for two reasons, chivalry and the concern that the women would tell others what was going on in the group meetings (Luce, 1971). Property crimes were the least likely to involve women. Because they were not trusted to retain secrets, they were commonly excluded from the planning and performance of any type of crime (Bowker, Gross & Klein, 1980). The amounts of gangs in which female members participated in activities and crime equally with males was rare in the early studies of gang research.

Theories, past and present, remained the same regardless of ethnicity of a gang member; the gang experience was the transitory product of the social tensions of immigrant youth newly arrived in a hostile city (Hagedorn, 1988). While the early work included European gangs, contemporary research now includes Hispanic, black and Asian gangs even though the location failed to change. For example, Anderson completed his work in Philadelphia and Sanchez-Jankowski included almost all the cities noted above. While Sanchez-Jankowski tried to include multiple cities because his theory was based on the foundation that different cities would yield different gangs, the cities he included failed to differ from past research. Finally, Hagedorn researched Milwaukee's gang issue, primarily untouched by gang researchers, but failed to include any other city.

The code of the street was the basic foundation to Anderson's theory of gangs in his study. Anderson is clear to label gang members as minority youth from the "ghetto poor" communities of the city. More specifically, he discusses how the code of the street revolves around presentation of self, respect, status and power. By teenage years, most youth have internalized the code of the street or have learned to comport themselves with its rules. Physical appearances such as clothes, jewelry and living conditions such as automobiles and apartments also plays an important part in how a person is viewed; to be respected, it is vital to have the right look (Anderson, 1999). Reviewing the differences between the "street-orientated" children and

the “decent” children, “decent” children are told to participate but never follow in order to survive on the streets. This is why “decent” children will sometimes follow the same pattern so they are not targets of violence and ultimately gain respect too. This makes it very difficult for police and community members to determine who is in fact “street-oriented” and who is “decent”.

Describing a gang member has proved to be difficult for some and rather easy for other researchers. Past research compares ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Contemporary research has also focused on the community, believing that the poor communities in which one lives will eventually pull a person into the gang. The community is also believed to be segregated and mainly of minority population, being the fundamental reason for gang members to be primarily black or Hispanic. Age is another central topic of gang members. Past and present research agrees that gangs are mainly adolescent. The gangs are also centered on male membership; however, the rise of female gangs is becoming a new and important issue to be studied.

## **Chapter Five – Modes of Material and Financial Accumulation**

Membership and gang formation begins with the lack of legitimate resources. When individuals lack an outlet to legitimate resources, they provide their own, often turning to illegitimate means. This section will discuss the economic resources obtained through gang membership.

Thrasher's study on street gangs in Chicago was well informed and used as a foundation for most gang research today. While Thrasher attempted to study different dimensions of street gang activity such as formation and disbanding of gangs and the definition of a gang, Thrasher ignored other aspects of gangs such as race, gender, political ties and more importantly, modes of material accumulation. Contemporary research is beginning to look at the economic activity of gangs, issues that lacked most historical research before the 1960s (Coughlin & Venkatesh, 2003). As contemporary sociologists examine the extent urban street gangs are entrepreneurially motivated and the commerce activity they are involved in, it shakes the foundation of Thrasher and other historical sociologists who found that gangs are territorial and interested in local politics, not monetary gain. Economic activity of the gang is vital because it can change the gang's demographic profile, its tendency to be violent, and the motivations behind gang membership and formation, thus changing the entire definition of a gang from the historical context to a more contemporary model.

In Hagedorn's first study, *People and Folks*, he discusses drug sales for foot soldiers in the gang. Drug sales are just another low-paying job, a job that may or may not guarantee survival with more risks than rewards. The study found that most members paid dues to the gang, similar to a membership fee. Most dues were less than five dollars a week, but this proved that the gang was organized and collected money for economic gain (Hagedorn, 1988, 93). The money was said to be used for events, parties, drugs and alcohol, and to bail out members of the gang from prison, however, most of the money was given to the leaders of the gang and most members were unaware of where the money went after that.



Testimony from Lieutenant Larry Carter of the Inglewood Police Department in 1989 describes the economic resources of gangs in the eyes of law enforcement. Lieutenant Carter states that:

Once disorganized and lacking both the leadership and resources, the gangs of today are organized, are goal minded, and well equipped with weapons, vehicles, electronic gadgetry, and fat budgets. The gangs of today, whether they realize it or not, are becoming business majors. They are involved in merchandising, franchising, retail and wholesale sales, and market expansion. Their product is illicit drugs, and the rock cocaine is the flagship of their line (Klein, 1995, 86).

Is this the factual picture of a gang? Is it possible Lieutenant is mistaking drug gangs and street gangs? Other researchers agree with Lieutenant Larry Carter and his depiction of street gangs. A social worker, Useni Eugene Perkins, stated:

Today's Black street gangs are more volatile, more destructive and more criminally oriented than their predecessors. They are also better organized to enact these negative traits. Due to the saturation of drugs in the Black community, Black street gangs have organized a network of drug trafficking that generates high profits which they are not willing to relinquish. And because of the hopelessness and despair that fester in the Black community, they have more than a sufficient number of consumers to support this lucrative enterprise (Skalitzky, 1990).

While it is true that gangs sell drugs in their communities, researchers and law enforcement personnel are creating "super-gangs" that simply do not exist. These "super-gangs" are fiends addicted to drugs and prone to violence. Because of this myth, legislators created tougher laws and stricter penalties, prosecutors added to existing laws such as the Continuing Criminal Enterprise (CCE) and the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) in order to help control the "super-gang" drug trade (Skalitzky, 1990, 349-350). These additions to the CCE and RICO laws helped incarcerate numerous leaders of infamous gangs throughout

the nation because of aiding and abetting a criminal enterprise. However, law enforcement must realize that removing a leader does not stop an organization.

Not to be mistaken, there are instances in history of notorious gang leaders who sold drugs for profit. Ricky Donnell Ross, known as “Freeway Rick”, ended up in an Ohio prison after a short lived glamorous career selling crack cocaine. His estimated income was between one million and two million a day controlling crack sales in Los Angeles. Brian Bennett, known as “Waterhead Bo”, became a legend and rivaled that of Keith “Stone” Thomas as the two infamous black gang leaders of Los Angeles selling crack cocaine (Klein, 1995,132). Where are these men today? As mentioned, Ricky is in jail. Keith and Brian are deceased after finding their bodies in gruesome crime scenes. These men are mainly the exception, not the rule, to gangs and drug sales. They feed the fantasies of the adolescent youths who hope to make it big one day like they have.

Anderson formed a timetable in order to understand the reasons behind gang member’s involvement in illegal activities for economic gain. He began by forming the most basic conclusion, many young blacks find it difficult to obtain a job and feel victimized by prejudice and discrimination. The feelings of victimization lead to a greater understanding, if not tolerance, of those who resort to dealing drugs in order to “survive”. In these circumstances, members who enter the drug trade become normal happenstance. The drug dealer then finds himself with money and distinguishes himself as a drug dealer with clothing, jewelry, and electronics or cars, bestowing on him a certain amount of self-esteem. Because self-esteem is an essential part of Anderson’s theory of the code of the streets, it is important to note this stage in the economic gain timetable. The owner of such items, through his exhibitions and displays, is able to gain deference from and status among his peers. Media images such as television, movies and music all fuel these desires as well. The people in these communities are desperate enough to turn to illegitimate means in order to have the respect and status on the streets. Eventually, this despair turns to alienation from the normal, mainstream culture (Anderson, 1999, 110-112). This does not

mean that someone who cannot get a stable, legitimate job is going to become a drug dealer. The facts of race relations, unemployment, dislocation, and the destitution create alienation, and alienation allows for certain receptivity to overtures made by people seeking youthful new recruits for the drug trade.

Contradicting Anderson's drug dealer theory, Venkatesh noticed that many foot soldiers, or members at the bottom of the hierarchy, sold drugs at minimum wage most adolescents could make flipping burgers at a fast food chain. Hagedorn found the same issue in his study, noting that "drug sales for most gang members are just another low-paying job... one that might guarantee survival, but not much else" (Hagedorn, 1988, 103). The theory of drug sales as a means of survival was short lived in this study. Venkatesh noticed a variety of ways the gang made money within their community that starkly contrasts all other research. First, the gang "taxed" members of the community. They taxed squatters who lease ended but still lived in the building, prostitutes who worked within each building, tenants for settling disputes, tenants for retrieving their stolen property when drug addicts or criminals ransacked the building and drug addicts who would go on drug binges and stay within the building. Next, they required "service fees" from community members who were trying to make ends meet by legitimate means (Venkatesh, 2008). Venkatesh noticed this when C-Note, an older man who was the building's repair man, tried to set up an mechanic garage in the parking lot to earn extra cash. J.T., the leader of the gang, did not want C-Note fixing cars in the parking lot for money and started a fight with C-Note, who was forced to disband his services and try to make money by other means, without the gang's knowledge. Similar stories are told throughout the community as those who tried to sell soda and candy in their apartment were quickly stopped and charged a fee by the gang.

The gang's involvement in illicit economic activities has changed the definition and intent of gangs and their members. Sanchez-Jankowski found that gang members commit illegal activities for financial gain depending upon their organizational structure, rules, and codes of conduct. Other studies have found the same results; drug trafficking is a secondary activity to

gang membership and identity, protecting territory, and “hanging out” (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991; Klein, 1971; Klein, 1995; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Contemporary research has also found that gangs involved in drug trafficking only represent a small portion of gangs. Historical research of gangs who found drug-involved or gangs that do not commit illegal activities solely for economic gain falls short in more contemporary research. Conversely, law enforcement’s approach to “super-gangs” that are taking over the underground economy also falls short in more contemporary research. There is a controversy in how gang’s produce money and what activities they are involved in, leaving an unclear answer.

## **Chapter Six – Deviant Behavior of Gang Members**

In the early years of gang research, many people overestimated the level of gang delinquency, as they do today, because they relied on media too often. Similar today, media portrays violence in such drastic accounts that the more typical, boring aspects of gang life are often overlooked. Sociologists are not innocent either. They tended to overstate gang violence in their reports, soon affecting law enforcement's view of inner-city street gangs. Gang members tend to talk about violence and crime a lot more than they actually commit any type of violent or delinquent activity. Contemporary research is continuing to strengthen their arguments of diminishing gang delinquency. While delinquency is an activity of a gang, it is not the main discourse and this needs to be addressed.

Thrasher described activities within gangs as diverse and motivated by typical youthful concerns, such as thrills and excitement. Several criminal acts were observed during the study, with stealing being the primary deviant act. Because Thrasher believed that gangs flourished due to conflict with rival gangs, fighting was the second most primary deviant act. Violence for these gang members served to both unite them and to adapt the gang to its environment, causing violence to be an important function in the integration of members into the group (Thrasher, 1927).

Based on the differential association theory, Shaw and McKay developed a theory of gang delinquency. Through three case studies, the sociologists illustrated delinquent associations. According to Shaw and McKay, juvenile delinquents are concentrated in lower income, industry areas with high crime rates. The location was described as having physical deterioration, a decreasing population, heterogeneity and adult crime patterns. Shaw and McKay also found reasons for high crime rates such as social disorganization. The results of Shaw and McKay's study prove that delinquency is a group behavior transmitted through associations with other delinquents. Other reasons for delinquency was found in the ineffectiveness of the family, lack of unity and value systems, poverty, heterogeneity, instability, unfamiliar cities and lack of

employment opportunities (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Shaw and McKay also note that these problems are intensified for blacks because of segregation.

Miller described features of lower class culture that explains the prevalence of gangs as well as the gang's involvement in delinquent acts. Individual concern over "trouble", "toughness", "smartness", "excitement", "fate", and "autonomy" (the six focal concerns of Miller's theory) are similar among lower class people and conflict with individual concern with "status" and "belonging" of the male adolescent corner group. The "status" is often achieved through the first six focal concerns (Miller, 1958, 5). This conflict associated in Thrasher, Shaw and McKay and Miller's studies questions the impact of delinquency on the gang – is simply belonging to the lower class or being disadvantaged relative to others higher in society?

Different from previous studies, Cloward and Ohlin believe that seeking opportunities for advancement by illegitimate means is the cause of gang delinquency. Their theory states that in integrated areas rational, disciplined, crime-oriented behavior emerges as the individual learns by example of his elders and by seeking approval from the elders. On the opposite side of this, unintegrated areas have gang members who express behavior in the form of conflict subculture. Cloward and Ohlin believe that crime is a result of integrated areas while violence is the result of unintegrated areas. For example, drug use and other kicks is an escapist reaction on the part of youngsters who are failures in the mainstream society (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Cloward and Ohlin, as well as Merton and several other sociologists of their era, believe that legitimate means to success goals are limited and cause intense pressures that are exerted toward deviant behavior.

Short and Strodbeck gathered gang data through the YMCA program in Chicago for its ability to establish contact with delinquent gangs and because of a current experiment with delinquency prevention techniques they were teaching gang members. Short and Strodbeck were interested in broadly representative groups of criminal activity based upon the typology of conflict, criminal and retreatist gangs in order to satisfy the needs of prior theories. However, Cloward and Ohlin's theory of criminally oriented gangs could not be found. Short and

Strodtbeck had a relatively hard time finding types of gangs whose “primary activities and norms were oriented around drug use or rational, systematic, economically motivated criminal activity” (1965, 11). Short and Strodtbeck’s difficulty to find a full-blown criminal group or more than one drug-using group is a finding of importance because it casts doubt on the generality of the gangs existence.

Instances of violence are also studied by Short and Strodtbeck. The study found that characteristics of lower class life involve public drinking, milling behavior, and a high incidence of guns may precondition the occurrence of acts of violence in which members of gangs are involved in. There is no explanation of why one member of a gang may be more or less violent than another; this is simply a matter of exposure to risk. Both fighting and casual sexual activity are considered group norms for gang members, creating higher risks for gang members than non-members. More formally, Short and Strodtbeck (1965, 168-169) categorized deviant behavior into:

- (1). Corner-Boy Delinquent: with highest loadings of gambling, signifying, hanging, drinking, riding in cars, fighting, and making money illegally; also involves truancy, lower class party behavior, and a good deal of heterosexual play.
- (2). Lower Class Social and Sexual: playing cards (not for money), dancing, sexual intercourse, and parties, this factor is less delinquent than Corner-Boy Delinquent and more formally organized, in the sense that it is more likely to have club meetings and less likely to involve hanging, although it is not incompatible with fighting and stealing.
- (3). Non-retreatist Conventional: high on school attendance and team athletics of the more traditional middle class pattern of school activities. It is incompatible with drinking, use of marijuana, and delinquency in general.

The different types of delinquent youth were categorized into these labels by the types of delinquent activities. Short and Strodtbeck played a lot of importance on the sexuality of the men involved in these groups, noting that sexual intercourse was a primary deviant act in most, if not

all, of the labels noted above. Interestingly, the deviant acts talked about in Chambliss's work are closely associated to Short and Strodtbeck. As Chambliss calls them, "the saints" are a group of white middle class boys. They are more closely associated with the "non-retreatist conventional" type discussed in Short and Strodtbeck's work because they were involved in after school activities, sports and pre-college programs. On the other hand, "the roughnecks" were a group of white lower class boys who could be more associated with the "corner-boy delinquents". The first group, "the saints", was mostly occupied with theft, truancy, gambling and vandalism. Chambliss found that "the saints" committed crimes on the other side of town, away from their own community because they had access to automobiles. Because of this, "the saints" were viewed as a group of friends rather than a delinquent gang. They also believed that their group was not committing any illegal crimes because it was not hurting anyone and it was only for fun. Conversely, "the roughnecks" did not have access to automobiles and frequently hung around in their own community which caused them to be labeled a delinquent gang. They committed acts of stealing, fighting and drinking. While "the saints" stole for fun, "the roughnecks" stole for profit (Chambliss, 1978). These unique characteristics make the label of a delinquent gang apply to "the roughnecks" but fail to apply to "the saints" even though most of the delinquent activities each gang committed were similar. Defining a gang is a crucial part of intervention and prevention of gangs in a community, as noted in Chambliss' work.

The definition of a gang, as described earlier in the paper, sometimes includes the activities of gang members. As for Miller, who has struggled with the definition of a gang for years did not know if delinquency should be a part of the foundation of the definition. Miller (1958) states;

One major area of disagreement concerns the role of criminal behavior in gang life. Although specifically illegal activities generally constitute a relatively small proportion of a gang's activities, they are often represented as its dominant preoccupation, or even as the basis of its existence. Thus, when youth groups in a particular community clearly appear to present a



problem, they are perceived as gangs; when they do not, that community has “groups”, not gangs.

The struggle is not faced by Miller alone. Many sociologists, as well as law enforcement professionals, clearly disagree over the issue of gang delinquency. The *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* is quoted saying that “a gang is a group of youths...banded together for antisocial and criminal activities” (as cited in Klein, 1995, 27). Law enforcement, quoting most prior research on gangs, shows a clear issue of defining gangs by criminal activities. Miller, the first sociologist of his time to address the issue of gang delinquency, proves that this definition can have a problem when the community tries to intervene and prevent gangs.

Contemporary sociologists also believe that defining gangs by criminal activities alone is a mistake. Klein believes that “street gangs through the years have done nothing more often than they have done something exciting. Their most customary activities are sleeping, eating, and hanging around... criminal acts are a minority of the activities they engage in and violent acts are a minority of those” (Klein, 1995, 29).

Hagedorn’s study sharply mimics the words of Klein when his study produced results that most Milwaukee gang activity was partying and hanging out. The only difference is the issue of gang expansion and fighting. As corner groups expand into more formalized gangs with distinct territories, constant fighting occurs with rival gangs which soon shape the gang structure (Hagedorn, 1988, 95). Hagedorn also noted that the conflict between authorities and gang members creates hostility between the two entities. This plays a crucial role in how gang members view themselves and obtain a delinquent or deviant identity.

More than any other delinquent act, drugs have been the basic foundation of gang delinquency. Drug sales and distribution, especially involving the crack cocaine epidemic since the mid-1980s has had law enforcement and sociologists on their toes. Attached to the stigma of drug sales and distribution is extreme violence over territory, customers and salesmen. There is a clear line drawn down the middle of sociological perspectives of gangs and drugs. Some

sociologists believe that drugs and gangs are an issue, while more contemporary sociologists believe that the connection has been blown way out of proportion by police officers, federal enforcement leaders, relentless politicians and the media.

Klein details an example of a zealous police official and his commitment to associate the drug epidemic with gangs in once city. The interview with the police official went as followed:

“Look, this narcotics stuff is all a matter of gangs and conspiracy. To me, a gang is any two or more guys working n crime together. In a drug sale, you got at least the seller and the distributor involved. Now that means it’s a conspiracy. And there are two guys, right. So all these crack sales are gang crimes...two or more guys conspiring to make crack sales mean it’s a gang affair...that’s how we define gangs around here” (Klein, 1995, 40).

In 1990, former Chief Daryl Gates was quoted in a Los Angeles Times interview, commenting on gang delinquency:

Well, I think that the drugs are there and probably the gang violence would not occur if they weren’t all on drugs. They are already, as the Sheriff says, driven by a sociopathic mentality that kind of permeates the group, and they have a few beers and snort some coke and they are on their way. “Why don’t we have some fun? Let’s go shoot somebody” (Klein, 1995, 120).

The distinction between drug sales and operations compared to gangs involved in drug sales is clearly perverse according to this law enforcement professional. Klein gives a perfect example of how the distinction between drug gangs and street gangs has warped over time. Klein asserts that drug-sales conspiracy carried out by any group needs the following for its success; (1) a clear, hierarchical leadership; (2) strong group cohesiveness; (3) a code of loyalty and secrecy; and (4) a narrow focusing on efforts on the mechanics of drug sales and the avoidance of independent or non-sales-related criminal involvement (Klein, 1995, 42). Members of a gang sell drugs for individual profit, not for the group. The reason for joining a gang is not solely to sell

drugs, so most gangs do not focus all efforts on drug sales. Clearly, a street gang lacks most if not all four of these characteristics.

Contemporary and historical sociologists all agree on one issue regarding gang delinquent behavior; extensive drug use is not a generally supported gang activity. The main delinquent behavior addressed in most contemporary studies is fighting, especially between rival gangs. A great example of this issue is found in Anderson's study.

What happens when a person is confronted on the streets? Anderson confronts the issue of respect and how it is closely tied to whether a person will be violent. If the individual were to run away, he would leave one's self esteem in tatters and invite further disrespect. Therefore a person must be willing to fight back – not only fight back but also “payback” for what the other person did to them (Anderson, 1999, 136). A gang member's identity, self-respect, and honor are often intricately tied up with the way they perform on the streets during and after such encounters.

Gang cohesiveness must be taken into account in order to understand group process and gang leadership. Cohesiveness gives clues to gang crime patterns. For example, cohesiveness accelerates violence, interferes with drug distribution and it accentuates some crime targets over others. Cohesiveness of gangs is pivotal to understand in order for law enforcement to properly intervene and control (Klein, 1995).

Anderson was the first to study “staging areas” as he termed them. What are “staging areas”? These are hangouts where wide mixes of people gather for various reasons. Within these “staging areas”, campaigns for respect are most often waged. Anderson (1999, 76-79) notes three types of staging areas:

1. Quite local, revolving around neighborhood establishments such as carry outs, liquor stores, and bars. May be inside, on a street corner outside, or at a house party with little/no adult supervision.

2. Business strip whose stores cater to street-oriented working-class and poor people. Buzzing with activity, it draws people from a larger area.
3. Multiplex theaters, sporting events, and concerts bring together large crowds from throughout the city. Such areas are the most volatile, especially at places such as roller-skating rinks or dances where there is music, alcohol, drugs, and rough crowds of young people inclined to “act out” what they have seen or heard other people do.

The “staging areas” Anderson observed plays a critical role in the delinquency of gangs. People from other neighborhoods who come out to staging areas typically represent themselves and are said to represent their neighborhood. This makes “staging areas” the most violent place because people have to represent themselves and have their reputation on the line. The worst kind of staging area is the school. Within the school grounds, children start to accept the street code and associate doing well in school as “acting white”, which will cause them to lose respect and dignity from their peers. In this social setting, many decent children will tend to “code-switch”. “Code-switch” means to act “street-oriented” when in the streets or staging areas (such as the school), but will ultimately live a “decent” life such as the lack of drugs and alcohol use, excelling in school and obtaining and maintain a legit job (Anderson, 1999, 77). Anderson notes that a school is an important staging area for many youths and it is often hard to excel. They are conflicted with “acting street” in order to gain respect and to be left alone, or to act “decent” in order to excel in life. In these “staging areas” presented by Anderson, most of the conflict to become delinquent or maintain a healthy lifestyle is called into question.

Through the years of hanging out with the Black Gangster Disciples in Chicago, Venkatesh noticed that gangs are far from the violent personified media image. The gang members that Venkatesh witnessed mainly hung out on streets, sold drugs, gambled, played sports and talked about women on a regular basis (2008). There was a clear distinction between selling drugs and using drugs, noting that doing drugs was frowned upon in this gang. However,

for the members of the community, the use of crack cocaine was like drinking alcohol for upper-middle class families. Venkatesh describes this similarity as blacks who occasionally used crack cocaine for fun was like middle class whites drinking alcohol for fun. On the other hand, there were black drug addicts, clearly addicted to crack cocaine just as there are white middle class individuals who are clearly alcoholics. In both communities the addiction is looked down upon. Venkatesh was also the first to talk about prostitution rings. While the gang avidly claimed they did not take part in the prostitution ring and that none of the members were considered “pimps” for these girls, the members were required to tax the women who worked as prostitutes in the building. The members were considered “johns” who used the girls for their services whenever they wanted without having to pay them. Venkatesh did not understand the difference and believed this gang to be part of the prostitution ring in Chicago’s housing projects.

Delinquency as a gang activity is an ongoing debate between law enforcement, sociologists and the media. Most studies in the past have discussed the issue of violence, drug use and abuse, drug sales and property crimes as main activities of gang members. However, contemporary research found that while these activities take place, it is seldom and most members hang around drinking and talking. This leaves a bad taste in the mouths of criminal justice professionals who have fought against the destructive nature of gangs throughout the United States.

## **Chapter Seven - Organizational Structure and the Community's Response**

The most concrete and stable sociological perspective of gangs falls within the organizational structure of a gang. Whether it was Thrasher's study in the 1920s or the most recent study conducted in the mid-1990s the theory of gang structure has continued to stay the same, with minor differences to be noted.

Thrasher noted that gangs played a variety of functions. He believed gangs originated from the spontaneous group activity of adolescents and were strengthened by conflict, consisting of a three stage process. In the beginning stages, the gang is diffused with little leadership and may even be short lived. Some gangs progress to the next stage, where they become cohesive. Conflict with other gangs plays a notable role in this stage, helping to define group boundaries and strengthen the ties between members, causing cohesion. The final stage occurs when it becomes conventionalized and members assume legitimate roles in society (Thrasher, 1927). The groups that fail to make this transition, delinquent or criminal acts become the main purpose of the group. Thrasher explained how gangs form, solidify and disintegrate better than any other sociologists of his era.

Postulating different types of gangs, Cloward and Ohlin labeled gangs based on types of communities the gangs formed in and the delinquent activities they engaged in. These gangs were called "fighting gangs", "criminal gangs" and "drug-using gangs" (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Each type of gang committed different delinquent activities and had a different structure or hierarchy.

The class system is what Cohen used to describe the community in which the gang functions. Cohen believed the delinquent subculture is more likely to be found in the working class. The family is used as a "network of social relationships" which has consequences for the personalities of their members (Cohen, 1955, 75). This means that the position of the family in the social structure, especially when compared to other families, determines the experiences and problems the family will encounter in their dealings with the outside world. Cohen's study focused on the family and how the family caused or prevented gang membership. Similar to

Anderson's theory of the "decent" family and the "street-oriented" family, Cohen believed that there are different types of families as well that will influence the interests and preferences of a child which will help determine the kinds of people and situations the child will encounter outside the family. The child will observe how their parents "interact with the janitor, the plumber, the doctor... the teacher, the landlord" (Cohen, 1955, 77-82). From there, the child will make the distinctions between the types of adults and their status and power they have on the community and family. Thus, the child learns the signs of membership in a social class. From this, the child learns the "middle-class measuring rod" as Cohen terms this structure of cultural values and beliefs. The child from the working class must come to terms with the middle-class standard, causing conflict. The discussion of the middle-class standard fits more closely with why individuals join gangs and who the gang members are, however, the start of Cohen's theory specifically blames the family, community and class system for how the gang functions in the neighborhood.

Short and Strodbeck found that the "exploitative attitude toward females might be important to the maintenance of high rank in the group" (1965, 32). Group process supports illegitimate conception as well as related sexual activities was discovered over the course of the study. If causing a girl to conceive a child had no effect on rank in the group, then group process is not likely to influence such behavior. However, if it has a negative effect then the individual may be expected to leave the group entirely. It was found that rank had a direct link to sexual conquests as well as conceptions because sex is a valued commodity for boys in this street-corner society because it is an indication of masculinity, ranking with skill in fighting and athletics. Sexual conquests also provided girls with a way of coping with the physical power of the male-dominated peer society.

Miller's theory of "female-based households" goes along with Short and Strodbeck's theory focusing on the girls' perspective of pregnancy. For lower class girls, "in a situation where girls controlled few really persuasive devices to bring about an agreement of marriage, it was

always possible to hope that the knowledge by ones mating partner that he was your baby's father would serve as the critical factor which would tip the scale in favor of such an agreement" (Miller, 1958, 28-29). The community also plays a role in this situation. For a girl who believes her reputation in the community is worsening, pregnancy can reverse the process and the community would regard her as an unmarried mother rather than the previous role given to her. The girl may also receive the desired attention at home for her pregnancy too, causing a trend in teenage pregnancy and single mother households.

Apart from the theory of "female-based households", Miller observed three leadership styles and the stereotypes associated to them. The first was a "military command" model; the second is a "key-personality" model; and the third is the "collective leadership" model (Miller, 1981, 297). While these models are simply stereotypes, there are clear hierarchies involved in each. In reality, leadership is more flexible and mirrors a democratic leadership. More often, the gang has a leadership style similar to the "key-personality" model in which the individual with the strongest personality is deemed the leader and the other members fall in behind the leader.

Contrasting Thrasher, Miller and Klein insist on defining gangs by characteristics operationally significant for law enforcement. Thrasher believed that gang members were neither more nor less criminal than other youth in their disorganized communities. For Thrasher, three aspects of gangs and their structure stand out above the rest; variation within a community, process of formation and age divisions. Thrasher also believed that gangs are unique because they "...may vary as to membership, type of leaders, mode of organization, interests and activities, and finally as to its status in the community" (as cited in Hagedorn, 1988, 84). Thrasher found different types of gangs within Chicago during his study, labeling them diffuse types, solidified types, conventionalized and criminal types. Because gangs are so unique, there are no general types of gangs with specific hierarchies, instead gangs have a collective history reflecting the communities where they formed. Thrasher also noted that gang formation and structure was



specifically centered on the age of the members. In order to analyze the gang, the researcher must look at the gang as an age-graded phenomenon.

Hagedorn agrees with Thrasher and his findings on the structure of gangs based on age. While police departments tend to picture gangs as a bureaucratic pyramid with “chiefs” on the top, “lieutenants” commanding troops and “privates” who are on the bottom of the pyramid, Hagedorn focused on the group as an “age-graded model” coined by Thrasher (Hagedorn, 1988, 86). Hagedorn found that each age group had its own “main group”, its leaders, and its “wannabe’s”. Each gang had a transition from “juniors” to “seniors” which either happened as the gang aged or in a more formalized process. Once the members were considered “seniors” they were in the “main group” of the gang (Hagedorn, 1988, 92-93). Finally, Hagedorn noticed that the titles for the leader are nonexistent. This meant that these titles previously discussed by law enforcement or prior research of “chiefs” or “leaders” did not exist and most titles were borrowed from gang literature. The names and ranks were formed from reading about gangs or passed down from Chicago gangs.

More contemporary research continues to follow the same path as past research but includes interesting issues. When discussing the structure of the gang, fictive relationships such as brothers or cousins are often involved. This represents a close connection with a so called “family” that many do not have at home. The gang members will have each other’s back and help each other out, especially in incidents of violence or gang warfare. The gang structure is composed more of individual responses to the community, as well as the communities responses to the individual, rather than the gang as a unit or whole. Regardless, the structure and community’s response still uses the foundation of prior research.

Anderson points out issues of self-esteem, status and power as the gang’s organizational structure. How “good” a person is corresponds with how “bad” of a neighborhood they come from. The tougher the neighborhood, the more prestige the person will gain. This prestige is closely related to leadership and status. Any indication of improvement in the person’s “decent”

status can be taken as a threat and cause for alarm. Efforts to achieve upward social mobility tend to be viewed as “disrespecting” their own community or gang (Anderson, 1999, 63). Respect on the street may be viewed as a form of social capital that is very valuable, especially when various other forms of capital have been denied or are unavailable. Not only is it a form of protection, but often forms the core of the person’s self esteem.

The community’s response consists of two issues in Anderson’s study; residents who become demoralized yet often try to coexist with drug dealings because they view the boys who are drug dealers as trying to make ends meet instead of “bad” or “delinquent”; and the lack of police and effective public policy to make their community safer and more lucrative. This makes the gang members more reliable to the community in response to protection. As a result of these two issues, the community tends to tolerate the gang.

Almost identical is Venkatesh’s community in which he studied the Black Gangster Disciples. Law enforcement refused to patrol the Robert Taylor Homes Housing projects because it was “too dangerous”. Thus, the gang was responsible for protection of the community members. This protection consisted of the gang conducting “rounds” throughout the few housing projects in their territory. During these “rounds” the members would kick out drug addicts, prostitutes and individuals who provoked fights. They collected taxes from squatters, customers and prostitutes. The gang also settled fights between tenants for the housing authority who did not help the community. From these situations, one can see how the gang can help the community. What most individuals do not notice is that the gang was usually the main instigators in the first place. The gang would sell drugs that would attract prostitutes and drug addicts. Their rival gangs caused violence within their territory, sometimes injuring or killing innocent members of the community. The gang members Venkatesh interviewed would boast about how much they helped their community but this was a warped sense of reality. J.T., the leader of the gang in the Robert Taylor Housing projects claimed that the fights were from foot soldiers, usually “over dumb high school shit”. J.T. prided himself in his efforts to make gang members more productive members

of the community making foot soldiers attend political rallies, donate money to social organizations specifically in their community, mandate that all high school gang members receive their high school diploma and lent gang members for protection (Venkatesh, 2008). Regardless of how the gang perceived themselves as productive members of society, the community tolerated the gangs control and used the gang as much as the gang used the community.

Klein attempts to describe gang structures through several interviews with gang members in Los Angeles. More than any type of gang structure, the “spontaneous” gang is the most common. These gangs would typically appear for a matter of weeks or months and then disappear. They were small in size and mainly young boys from a community who were simply “trying out” gang life but found it detrimental to their well-being (Klein, 1995, 58). These groups were unorganized, very territorial and primarily male members.

On the other spectrum of the “spontaneous” gang was the more traditional or “vertical” gang. “Vertical” gangs had duration of many years and in some cases regenerated itself over decades within a community. The gang is very stable causing traditional gangs to be highly researched and regarded as the only type of gang structure while this is not true. Surprisingly, during Klein’s research interviewing one gang member in a “vertical” gang, asked if his family knew about his gang involvement. The member replied, “Ask for yourself”. When Klein asked the grandfather, he proudly displayed the gang tattoo on his arm and replied “what’s good enough for me is good enough for my grandson” (1995, 58). The gang is symbolized a fraternity the member’s father or grandfather was once a part of; the gang was respected and looked upon as a rite of passage for the young boy. The “vertical” gang also has several subgroups based on age. The oldest are considered seniors or “old heads”. The next age groups were considered juniors, constituting a middle-age group, and finally the midgets or “babies” who were the youngest.

This age group structure was found in Venkatesh’s study of the Black Gangster Disciples in Chicago. The hierarchy was simple, the board of the directors (similar to the “old heads”), officers or junior gang members and finally the foot soldiers or “babies” described by Klein. The

structure reflected age with the board of directors ranging in age from thirty to forty years old, the officers ranging in the early to mid-twenties, and finally the foot soldiers who were early to late teens (Venkatesh, 2008). Each officer would be in charge of a subgroup of the Black Gangster Disciples within the Chicago area. J.T. was the officer who Venkatesh met his first day in the housing projects. J.T. was in charge of a treasurer who looked over the gangs finances, security coordinators (also known as J.T.'s body guards), and several directors who were in charge of six person teams. The six person teams were the foot soldiers who sold drugs within the community.

Both Klein and Venkatesh had similar results in their studies. Both found that gang leadership was highly varied but in the traditional gangs leadership coincided with age and years of involvement in the gang. Each subgroup or "clique" had its own leadership. As for Venkatesh, J.T. was the leader for his subgroup of Black Gangster Disciples in the Robert Taylor Housing projects. While the Black Gangster Disciples had subgroups throughout the city of Chicago, J.T. was only responsible for his "clique" within the housing projects. Klein found this in his study as well, noting that the youngest subgroups had its own leadership, as did the juniors, the seniors and the girls' groups. Older groups usually had a stronger reputation and group process is far more complex than most police or media stereotypes indicate (Klein, 1995, 59).

The organizational structure of a gang has been the foundation for much sociological research throughout history. The organizational structure is a tradition for most gangs; however, the communities in which they terrorize are not. Sociologists such as Cohen, and Cloward and Ohlin who find that gangs have become entrenched in their communities and neighborhoods, primarily as a byproduct of the "working-class" as coined by Cohen. Because of the effects of segregation and desegregation, gangs have become a major issue in the United States.

## **Section Two – Ex-Gang Member Perspectives of the Gang**

### **Chapter One – Crips is My Last Name**

Defining a gang is an obvious struggle between historical and contemporary sociologists. Law enforcement has added to this struggle by defining the gang phenomenon based on criminal acts. The constant contradictions have created one vast, misunderstood perception. There are other sources, such as a gang member's perspective, that can be used to define a gang. From firsthand experience, gang members can accurately detail their everyday activities and routines and provide a basic understanding of a gang.

The most notorious street gang, the Crips, was founded by Stanley Tookie Williams in 1969. Tookie tells all in his memoir, including the foundation of the gang and what the gang meant to him during this time period. The Crips were formed when Tookie and another member, Raymond Lee Washington, decided to unite the west and east sides of South Central Los Angeles. The original name for the alliance was "Cribs", a name selected from many options. "Cribs" was carelessly mispronounced "Crips" and morphed into the infamous gang that has terrorized California for many years. Uniting the east and west side gangs was a choice that Tookie believed would help strengthen bonds and protect themselves and family members. Tookie specifically states that he did not form the Crips as a way to "protect the community" or as a "revolutionary agenda" (Williams, 2004). Tookie specifically states that the numerous rumors of how street gangs such as the Crips were formed as a spin-off of the Black Panther Party are fiction and there was never a set motive to the formation of the Crips. According to Tookie, his gang "began establishing the missing link of camaraderie through common interests: partying, girls, fighting, kinship, and hustling" (Williams, 2004, 58). Lacking a motive strongly contradicts sociologist's who believed that gangs were formed solely with a motive to help protect the community. Apparent in Venkatesh's study of street gangs in Chicago, the gang was a huge part of the community and everything the gang did was for the community's benefit. Venkatesh believed the gang's definition of a gang contradicted what he observed. The Black Disciples

Venkatesh studied mostly drank alcohol, used drugs, hung around the apartment buildings and talked about girls and gambled. This closely emulates Tookie's account of how the gang was established and he strongly urges that the formation of the Crips was far from helping their community.

More specific to Tookie's definition of a gang, Anderson defined gangs by the "code of the street" which included defending oneself from the injustices of police. Anderson continues by describing the "code of the street" as a set of informal rules of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations, especially violence, among young men and women. Tookie would agree with Anderson's definition describing the streets of Los Angeles as "criminal activity [that] was an economic necessity and violence" was something you "had to take". According to Tookie, you must "adapt and survive...that was the street rule" (Williams, 2004, 5). Thrasher's definition of a gang also coincides with Tookie's tale of how the gang formed spontaneously. Thrasher stated that gangs were interstitial groups originally formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict. Tookie's account of uniting the gangs and forming the Crips was spontaneous and began to develop into a more dangerous and organized gang as society forced them into isolation, creating conflict. Historical and contemporary definitions of gangs emulate Tookie's perception and definition of his own gang.

Kody Scott, known to his friends and family as Monster, was also part of the Crips in South Central Los Angeles approximately ten years after the Crips formation by Tookie Williams. Monster described the gang he was involved in similar to the United States military. He understood gangs as "squads" who would "make raids into neighboring territories for preemptive strikes or retaliatory hits on enemies and targets useful to the opposition". More specifically, these armies had "a distinct territory – the boundaries of some very large areas are broken by enemy cluster camps...each army has a flag, to which total allegiance is pledged...each army has its own language, customs, and philosophy" (Shakur, 1993, xii). Monster's definition is almost parallel to Malcolm Klein (1971) who states that gangs are:

Any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost always with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies.

While both definitions include a denotable group with a group name and delinquent activities or “retaliatory strikes against the enemy”, Monster Kody viewed the gang as a military group. Completely different from other views, Monster Kody uses the military analogy of the gang throughout his entire memoir.

Colton Simpson was also a Crip member in Los Angeles during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Colton saw his gang as “a full-time job” (Simpson, 2005, 24). His loyalty and allegiance to the gang was strong as he told tales of fighting to the death for his “brothers” and “cousins”. According to Colton, his family was the Crips and considered Crips as his last name, sparing no time or emotion for his own blood relatives. Contemporary and historical sociologists tended to ignore any deep emotional attachment to the gang. Sociologists formed their definitions around criminal activities and theoretical explanations of gangs but none considered the strong familial attachment that gang members form and how gang members tend to define themselves as a family. Theories point towards the lack of family support at home in which individuals will then seek alternatives, such as a gang, in order to replace the lack of family support at home. These theories include Miller’s (1958, 5), “female-based households” which create identity problems and are worked out on the street with the gang, and Anderson’s (1999) “decent single mother” who must work even harder to neutralize the draw of the street and does so primarily by instilling decent values in her children. Colton’s definition of a gang not only contradicts sociological definitions, it also differs from the other ex-gang member’s definitions.

Luis Rodriquez grew up in Watts and the Las Lomas barrio, east of Los Angeles, California. During his adolescence, Luis joined several small groups he called “clubs or *clicas*”.

Luis believed that joining a gang meant that it was “something to belong to...something that was ours” (Rodriquez, 1993, 41). More specifically, Luis (Rodriquez, 1993, 250) describes gangs as:

Gangs are not alien powers. They begin as unstructured groupings, our children, who desire the same as any young person. Respect. A sense of belonging. Protection. The same thing that the YMCA, Little League or the Boy Scouts want. It wasn't any more than what I wanted as a child. Gangs flourish when there's a lack of social recreation, decent education or employment. Today, many young people will never know what it is to work. They can only satisfy their needs through collective strength – against the police, who hold the power of life and death, against poverty, against idleness, against their importance in society.

Contemporary sociological definitions of gangs are comparable with Luis's definition of a gang. Anderson's account of respect and status coincides with this definition. Sanchez-Jankowski's definition was based on several foundations such as an organization around an intense competition for and conflict over the scarce resources that exist in an area, an alternative social order and an organizational response to increase material wealth. Both definitions agree that gangs form as a collective strength or organizational response to a society lacking resources, education and employment.

The Latin Kings and Latin Disciples created a safe haven for Reymundo Sanchez. Reymundo, similar to other gang members, defines the gang as a structure in which one “belonged”. For Reymundo, he saw the gang as a family, even mentioning how Jawbreaker and Maddog, two associate gang members, made “gangbanging a family affair”. According to Reymundo (Sanchez, 2000, 165), gang's included their family members:

Their father was a King and the sons and daughters were all Kings and Queens. This type of family existed in every neighborhood I ever hung around in. The members of these families are usually violent, promiscuous, drug users, and eager to get everybody involved in their actions. Sadly, this type of family still exists in many neighborhoods.



Different from other perspectives, Reymundo talks about how these types of families are the most dangerous to associate with because they pulled individuals who lacked a structured family into the gang, in turn creating a family the individual never had.

Finally, Bill Lee grew up in San Francisco's Chinatown during the 1960s and 1970s. This is where Bill learned about the most notorious Chinese gangs and the workings of the Chinese Underworld. Bill described the small gang he joined during his adolescence as "brotherhood, courage and loyalty" that "prevailed over oppression, greed and betrayals, with revenge thrown in for action" (Lee, 1999, 67). Bill's definition does include some violence, but once again focuses on the gang as a family unit.

The most obvious commonalities found within the definitions of a gang provided by each ex-gang member includes the foundation of the gang as a family, an association in which one belongs and a spontaneously formed group in a response to a society lacking legitimate resources. Poverty and discrimination play a large role in each and every ex-gang members' life. Sociologists have also made a point to mention these issues. Contradicting ex-gang members, the sociologists lacked a basic understanding of the support and family structure the gang provides, as well as the organization as a whole which is unmotivated and not based on criminality. Thrasher, Sanchez-Jankowski and Anderson's definition of a gang emulate how these ex-gang members's define their association to the gang while Klein and Miller are more concerned with supporting law enforcement's definition of a gang as a violent conspiracy group. The biggest commonality between ex-gang member definitions and sociologists is the idea of "short-run hedonism with little interest in long-run goals" described by both Klein and Cohen. Tookie made a point in saying that the uniting of the small gangs into the Crips was unmotivated and unorganized with no revolutionary goals. The other five ex-gang members did not note any motivation or interest in long term goals besides gaining money, status and power within their community.

## **Chapter Two – No Other Choice but the Gang**

Researchers have theorized the reasons individuals join gangs, ranging from small peer groups that formed as “dance groups” to more organized and dysfunctional entities that form out of a response to immigration, discrimination and poverty. Contemporary and historical research has shed light on to the reasons for gang membership; however, the most specific reasons to joining a gang comes from the personal reasons and experiences from ex-gang members.

Racial discrimination and poverty was best explained by Tookie Williams and his struggle with his identity, ultimately leading to him joining a small gang in his neighborhood. Tookie states that “more than five hundred years of slavery, I was left only scattered remnants of a broken culture...exposed to a multitude of ambiguous, mostly negative influences, I would pass through my young life with cultural neglect and profound identity crisis...I needed to shape my identity” (Williams, 2004, 15). The issues of personal identity and racial discrimination were the largest influences in Tookie’s decision to join a gang. Tookie also stated, “For me there were no Rotary Clubs, yacht clubs, Explorers Clubs, boys’ academies, or any other privilege-bound associations... I was afforded equal opportunities among street thugs, ex-cons, pimps, gamblers, con men, thieves, prostitutes, and other hustler types” (Williams, 2004, 15). Lacking formal clubs and a sense of belonging was Cohen’s theory behind gang membership. Cohen believed that everyone in society wants to be a member in good standing of groups that share the same age, race, sex, belief or value system. With a lack of legitimate groups, the only associations Tookie had the opportunity to join were the street gangs.

Similar to Cohen’s theory of gang membership stated above, Thrasher’s theory of gang formation and membership derived from groups isolated from mainstream society by both geography and lack of access to legitimate institutions. This isolation contributes to individuals joining gangs and forcing them to stay within the gang in order to survive in their poor economic environment. Monster Kody addresses this issue in the most literal sense when he states that joining a gang is the “equivalent of growing up in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and going to college:

everyone does it” (Shakur, 1993, 138). Monster Kody’s attitude about joining a gang also coincides with Miller and Short and Strodbeck’s theory of gang membership. For these sociologists, the “distinct lower class value system” was the cause of gang membership. The lower class value system competes with the middle class value system creating a contradiction. With that said, it is clear that growing up in the suburbs of Michigan and going to college, as Monster Kody states, is the equivalent of poverty stricken minorities joining a gang. The middle class value system looks upon education and legitimate employment as a tool for survival, while the lower class value system, unable to access proper education leading to legitimate employment, use the gang as a means of survival.

Issues concerning socioeconomic status and ethnicity are also apparent in numerous memoirs. This coincides directly with both historical and contemporary research on gangs and deviance. Anderson discusses the “ghetto poor”, defined as communities that lack jobs that pay a living wage, limited basic public services (police response in emergencies, building maintenance, trash pickup, lighting, and other services that middle-class whites take for granted) stigma of race, the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and absence of hope for the future (1999, 27-32). Simply stated, living in an environment such as this places young people at special risk of falling victim to gang membership. Luis’s theory on gang membership and deviance directly corresponds with Anderson’s theory; criminality is an issue of class. Luis states that many minorities are warehoused in overcrowded prisons and considered “criminals of want”, or individuals who have been deprived of the basic necessities of life and therefore forced into criminal acts in order to survive. These “criminals of want” are members of a social stratum which include “welfare mothers, housing project residents, immigrant families, the homeless and unemployed” (Rodriquez, 1993, 10). Even more to the point, Luis (Rodriquez, 1993, 248) is quoted in one chapter describing this issue as the first social response to an economic revolution because of:

The shift from mechanical productive energy to one based on electronics. In Los Angeles, this translated into tens of thousands of jobs lost as factories such as Goodyear, Firestone, General Motors, Bethlehem Steel and American Bridge closed down forever – many of which I worked for during the 1970s. Along with this came the cyclical crisis of glutted markets and a shrinking consumer base, where more was being produced by fewer people (as the technology could only integrate a few). The mode of distribution began to break down. From cars to electronic items – goods lay idle while an increasing number of people had to do without. The resultant economic decay – L.A. has the second largest homeless population in the country – was the foundation for the kind of response that followed the Rodney King verdicts. Add to this one of the most brutal police forces in America, and you have a riot in the making; it was only a matter of time.

Decker and Van Winkle based their theory of gang membership around the issues pointed out by Luis. These include changes in immigration, urbanization, ethnicity and poverty. All four factors contribute to the formation and growth of gangs. Colton also addresses the issue of socioeconomic status and ethnicity, claiming that society has a “love/hate reaction to the ghetto”. From Colton’s (Simpson, 2005, xvii) perspective of gang membership:

Getting rid of the ghetto and economic inequality is never going to happen in this particular society. This is capitalism and we need our status quo. We’ll always have people who haven’t gotten their foot up. Back in the day, it was Irish people and Jewish people. Now the Black and Mexicans fill the ghettos.

Conversely, Colton boldly states that while issues of poverty and race play a role in gang formation and membership, it is not the only reason for crime. Growing up in dysfunctional or violent family also play a role in gang membership. Colton states that people “think being financially middle class, getting degrees, or owning a business make a family good...they don’t know shit about my family...love is what makes a good family” (Simpson, 2005, 220). The lack

of love and kindness is the reason Colton joined the gang in his neighborhood, although admitting that poverty and poor socioeconomic status also contributed to his membership.

Colton's admittance of a poor family structure is another commonality among ex-gang member memoirs. Colton's (Simpson, 2005, 152-153) anguish from a broken home to racism to poor education is seen in one passage within his memoir:

The hood itself plants the seed of joining a gang in your mind. Over-worked, broken families don't have the ability to fight streets that hold out the lure of belonging, thrills, fame, money, the American Dream. We have our own heroes. And because of the segregation imposed by the combination of White racism and the housing industry – the real estate agents who made money by blockbusting and the banks that made money by redlining and charging Blacks higher interest rates and thus creating the ghettos – we have developed our own culture. Some of it you know about – the charged energy in African rhythm and complex rhymes of rap. Our unique twists in clothing, walk, and talk. Whites come into our lives via TV, mostly in commercials, or as cops, or teachers. Unemployment for Black men in South Central L.A. is 30 percent; the national average is 5 percent. And as hopes for jobs diminish, other alternatives – the underground economy – become a way of life. The gangs organized the underground economy. The gangs provide heroes. The gangs teach skills. The gangs provide love and protection. The gangs fill in where America has failed.

Monster Kody's (Shakur, 1993, 103) childhood directly contributed to his uneasiness in life and more importantly, his gang membership:

I had no idea of peace and tranquility. From my earliest recollections there has been struggle, strife, and the ubiquity of violence. This ranged from economic destitution of my family to the domestic violence between my parents, from the raging gang wars to the omnipresent occupational police force in hot pursuit... Everything in my life has been subject to drastic change or subtle movement, without so much as a hint or forewarning.

I've been, all my life, and, truly, I've never been comfortable. Motion has been my closest companion, from room to room, house to house, street to street, neighborhood to neighborhood, school to school, jail to jail, cell to cell – from one man made hell to another.

According to Kody the “set (gang) was my clearest vision of stability” (Shakur, 1993, 103). The stability a gang can provide would certainly pull an individual into considering membership, especially when everything else around them seems to be unstable.

The sense of self-worth, power, status, and material wealth was a common theme addressed in most memoirs of ex-gang members. Luis was constantly bullied in junior high school, soon forming his own gang in order to establish fear. Luis wanted the power and status that came with the fear. In addition to Luis, Monster Kody believed that “total lawlessness” was alluring and more intoxicating than any drug (Shakur, 1993, 70). Monster Kody's membership can be attributed to many issues but the most compelling was the idea that he could obtain power within his community. Contemporary research covers the importance of power and status as reasons behind gang membership. According to Sanchez-Jankowski, individuals in the community believe that through the business dealings of the gang or the connections established while in the gang, they will be able to improve the quality of their lives associated to respect, money, status and power. Sanchez-Jankowski covers three issues regarding gang membership; the prestige of the gang, the efficiency of its operations and the level of services to its members considered adequate (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991, 30). Becoming a member involves the interaction between the group and the individual. These two evaluations will determine the number of members in the gang and the extent to which individuals in the community will become involved in the gang.

Power and status also emerged in Bill's testimony of gang membership. Bill's perspective of gang membership included poor self-esteem and an urge to compete for status. Bill claimed that “our self-esteem were lacking to begin with...we also desired the finer things that

represented status and success, but we were ashamed of our parents working “coolie” jobs... we wanted cars, clothes and cash to come fast and easy and we wanted to live on our terms and make up our own rules” (Lee, 1999, 126). Bill also notes that children represented their parents who traveled to America for a more prosperous life called the *Gum Shan* or Gold Mountain, only to be faced with limited opportunities and discrimination. The youth felt neglected and abandoned by their parents who worked long and tedious hours just to keep food on the table. The feeling of neglect manifested into anger and soon these youth formed groups as a way to alleviate their anger and frustration.

The most interesting historical theory behind gang formation is Thrasher’s “play-groups”, defined as a “gang in embryo” (1927, 23). Thrasher believed gangs were unique and represented a variable of experiences of groups of immigrant youth adjusting to disorganized life in a new country. These groups began as innocent groups of youth, looking for thrills. Eventually, these “play-groups” formed into dangerous and highly organized street gangs. This also coincides with Hagedorn’s contemporary research of Milwaukee gangs. Hagedorn found a variety of motivations for forming each gang such as “dancing gangs”. Dancing gangs were the most popular among black and Hispanic youth in which they formed together to dance and hang-out. Soon these “dancing gangs” formed into groups who rivaled with one another by having dancing competitions. Decker and Van Winkle also found that gang members joined gangs because they grew up in the same neighborhood and evolved from “play-groups” defined by Thrasher. These types of “play-groups” cannot be found in Tookie, Colton, Monster Kody, or Reymundo’s account of gang membership, however, this type of group formation was very popular in Luis and Bill’s account of gang formation. Bill’s gang formed on the playground in 1964 as a group who congregated on the basketball court and played soccer and volleyball (Lee, 1999, 31-32). Luis details the innocent beginning of most gangs as a club that began as a group of guys who played football together or set up trips to the beach or mountains. Other gangs became more organized as they “obtained jackets, with their own colors, and identification cards...some of the clubs

metamorphosed into something more unpredictable, more encompassing...something more deadly” (Rodriquez, 1993, 43).

Several researchers have discussed the sexual promiscuity within male gangs. These issues consisted of sexual conquests with females who associated with the gang, a main focus of gang membership. The only gang member who discussed sexual activity as a reason for joining the gang was Reymundo. Reymundo brags about how easy it is to have any girl he wanted when he was associated with the gang. The trend followed a pattern of the more violent and criminally active a gang member was, the easier it was to be sexually promiscuous (Sanchez, 2000, 132). The effortless sexual conquests were not the only reason Reymundo joined the gang. Similar to other ex-gang members, liberation was a factor that pushed the individuals into gang membership. Money, power, wealth and freedom drove Reymundo to join the gang and continue to be a member in order to achieve “ghetto celebrity” status. “Ghetto celebrity” status is defined as a gang member who wears “designer clothes, big gold watch, gold chains, gold earrings” (Sanchez, 2000, 53). Reymundo’s focus on sexual conquests was different than most of the ex-gang member’s accounts of gang membership.

Because the gang is isolated from mainstream culture, they are forced to create their own set of rules different from legitimate institutions. These rules centered around power, status and material wealth as a way to survive on the streets. The underlying theme was racial discrimination and poverty with blocked access to legitimate resources such as employment and education. Blocked access to legitimate resources caused Tookie, Colton, Monster Kody, Reymundo, Luis and Bill to find other ways to survive in their neighborhoods. A few differences between each ex-gang members’ reason for joining the gang consisted of sexual conquests or the group forming from childhood “play-groups” defined by Thrasher. Order is maintained through informal mechanisms as well, particularly “collective representations” such as symbols, signs and a private language.



### **Chapter Three – The Underbelly of Society**

Understanding the ethnic and gender composition of a gang is associated with many factors. The ethnicity, gender and age of gang members were a major sociological foundation in all gang research. Historical research studied gangs in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Contemporary research attempted to study the gang phenomenon in similar cities but did not deviate from historical research, especially concerning ethnicity and gender. The only studies concerning non-minority gangs was Thrasher who studied European immigrants in crowded cities and Chambliss who studied two groups of Caucasian gangs defined as “the saints” and “the roughnecks”. Most research focused on minority youth in large cities across the United States. In order to encompass all ethnicities and locations, ex-gang member memoirs were chosen from different locations and ethnicities to mirror historical and contemporary research such as African American, Asian and Hispanic gangs located in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago.

A gang member’s perceived opportunity of success is a constant theme between the ex-gang members. Initially from Cohen’s theory of perceived opportunities, he coined the term “frames of references” which is defined as a person’s perspective of a situation and how the person will respond in the situation will differ depending on interests, preconceptions, stereotypes and values (1955, 53). The common “frame of reference” seen within every ex-gang member memoir was survival. In order to survive on the streets, becoming involved in a gang was necessary. Tookie grew up believing that “all black people were inhuman and inferior...had no contribution to the forward thrust of civilization” (Williams, 2004, 39). Tookie’s “frame of reference” was African American’s could not assimilate with any cultural group other than their own and therefore needed to rely on themselves to protect their community, sustain an income and educate themselves. This has lead to Tookie’s gang membership, and eventually, the formation of the Crips. Recognizing that gangs are needed to protect the community and

criminality was the only way to provide a decent income, young black males in South Central Los Angeles formed groups in order to survive on the streets.

Similar stories are told from Monster Kody and Colton's perspective of gang composition. Monster Kody believed that the situations he faced in life all gravitated around a survival instinct: kill or be killed. These conditions dictated that Monster Kody either join a gang or perish alone (Shakur, 1993, 131). Colton held a similar view of "do or die" and "kill or be killed". Colton (Simpson, 2005, 118) believed he had limited choices when he states:

There's no second-guessing. If I didn't get them, they'd get me. No you had choices, not just one choice. If you truly wanted to survive, why did you join the gang where Black men die in dog years? Maybe I didn't want to survive. Maybe there wasn't much to live for. No, you lust for that celebrity that fame, power, admiration. The gang is your clearest vision of stability. No. It was me. My loyalty and deed.

The survival theme was found in other ethnic gangs in different locations as well, incorporating Luis, Reymundo and Bill. Luis found an aspect of suicide within young people who have limited options and believe that it is either "*la torcida* or death; a warrior's path" (Rodriquez, 1993, 9). Regardless of ethnic, gender or age composition of a gang, each ex-gang member and their peers perceived limited choices in order to survive on the streets, causing them to join the gang. Cohen's theory resounds throughout all memoirs when considering gang composition that focuses on young minorities in urban locations.

The study of two Caucasian gangs of different socioeconomic status was conducted by Chambliss. This research is unique because it encompasses two gangs of the same ethnicity but different socioeconomic status. Chambliss found that lower class boys were treated differently from the middle class boys, soon causing the boys in each gang to perceive opportunities for success, and encounters with police officers and community members differently. The memoir written by Reymundo was the only story that encompassed white gangs and how their socioeconomic status allowed them to "get away with murder". Reymundo moved to Chicago

when he was young and soon found how the gangs in the city were unique. His friend Jorge showed him scars and claimed it was from white boy gangs beating him up. While walking to school one day, a group of white boys started to yell racist slangs to Reymundo. When Reymundo told his friends they all said these white boys terrorized younger Puerto Ricans. Reymundo became scared because he had never experienced racial hatred. Eventually Reymundo noticed that the white gangs were able to commit undetected crimes because of their color and socioeconomic status. However, Reymundo and his friends were not. Reymundo “immediately recognized that when a Puerto Rican complained about abuse from a white person they were classified as weak, cowardly and unable to conform to American ways, however, when a Puerto Rican became an aggressor, he was classified as an animal, not fit to live in American society” (Sanchez, 2000, 9-10). Infuriated by this constant contradiction of race and socioeconomic status, Reymundo became more truant and violent alongside his friends in the gang. Chambliss’s findings in his study of “the saints” and “the roughnecks” was portrayed in Reymundo’s memoir and should not be taken lightly when considering ethnicity and socioeconomic status of gang members. Race and socioeconomic status have major impacts on gang membership and the advancement of its members in society.

Contemporary research strayed away from studying ethnic and gender composition and focused strictly on personalities of gang members. Klein labeled two types of gang members as “core” and “fringe” members. “Core” members consisted of gang members who were more involved in gang crime and had a considerable amount of respect and loyalty for the gang. On the other hand, “fringe” members were the opposite and loosely associated with the gang (Klein, 1995, 60). Anderson (1999) found the same distinction but labeled these members “street-oriented” and “decent”. Venkatesh (2008) found that there were different “breeds” of gang members. There were “jailhouse niggers” who were devoted to building solidarity within the gang and staying together during times of arrest, death or gang wars. There were also the “operators” who viewed the gang as a purely commercial enterprise.

The contemporary research parallels with African American ex-gang member memoir when discussing types of gang members rather than their ethnic and gender composition. Tookie believed that there were two types of African American gangs during his time era. The “black gangs were a commonality that existed long before... the old gangs... had become ethnically-conscious and were absorbed into the Black Panther Party or other active political groups” (Williams, 2004, 80-81). Aside from the politically and ethnically-conscious gangs, the other gang that Tookie associated with committed crimes, used drugs and were sexually wanton. Colton described the difference between “riders” and “CEOs”. The “riders” are the soldiers who are out on the streets everyday fighting, stabbing and shooting. From Colton’s perspective, “all gangbangers are gangsters, but not all gang members are riders” (Simpson, 2005, 31). The riders are defending the gang and proving their worth to the gang during every incident of violence and criminality. Aside from the “riders”, “CEOs” are the leaders and are rarely seen on the streets and scarcely represent the gang. This coincides with Venkatesh’s theory of gang members who view the gang as their loyalty and life and those who view the gang as an enterprise.

The defiant individualist was a common personality trait found in Sanchez-Jankowski’s contemporary study of gangs. The defiant individualist is a personality trait containing seven attributes such as competitiveness, mistrust or wariness, self-reliance, social isolation, survival instinct, social Darwinist worldview and defiant air (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991, 23-27). Each ex-gang member encompassed at least one of these attributes during their adolescent involvement with the gang. All ex-gang members were competitive and have a physical aggression that forms from the lack of resources in low-income communities, creating a survival instinct. Tookie formed this view and considered it as being either “prey or predator”. Tookie had to “learn to fight dirty, to cheat, and to look for angles, openings, mistakes” (Williams, 2004, 59). Noted earlier in the paper, each ex-gang member held their view of “kill or be killed”, the survival instinct Sanchez-Jankowski discusses in his study. Each attribute of Sanchez-Jankowski’s defiant

individualist is intertwined with the competitive “kill or be killed” aspect of life. This is attributed to the poor economic conditions of their environment and lack of legitimate resources.

Female gang association is commonly misrepresented in historical and contemporary research. The fact that females form gangs and participate in gang activities needs to be addressed in research. Ex-gang members found that females fully participated in their gang, making sure the reader understood that female gangs are not a myth. Tookie defined female gang members as “Criplettes” who were considered the “female versions of the Crips” (Williams, 2004, 101). The Criplettes began as a group of girls who hung around the gang, dating some of the male gang members but eventually gained notoriety for their indiscriminate attacks on both female and male rival gang members. The Criplettes were considered violent, trigger-happy and dangerous and could be trusted during times of police pressure, making them the perfect companions to the Crips. The females Monster Kody encountered during his membership were those who were just as violent and participated in deviant acts with the male members. Monster Kody discusses one incident where the males used female drivers in their getaway cars because the police were less likely to pull over an African American female, the males hiding in the back seat (Shakur, 1993, 86). Luis, noted earlier as joining the gang for access to females, realized that these females were not just there as sex objects for the male gang members. These females called themselves *cholas* and had a reputation for fighting other females and even male members of rival gangs (Rodriquez, 1993, 44). Reymundo gave a more detailed account of the female gangs in his story. Reymundo affiliated with the Latin Kings and their female counterpart, the Latin Queens. Essentially, the Latin Queens hung around with the Kings but were not allowed to participate in gang meetings. They had to honor and follow the same set of rules as the Kings, however, there were a few differences. One rule included the requisite to have sexual relations with the men in the Latin Kings. This was not part of their initiation but instead part of the job duties as a Latin Queens. The Latin Queens also smoked, drank and used drugs with the Kings. Females were used as drug mules to smuggle drugs into the prison for incarcerated Kings and was the main job

requirement in order for a Queen to climb ranks within the gang. Reymundo discussed a robbery scheme between himself and a few friends who used the Queens as decoys to lure unsuspecting victims into alleyways promising sex, only to find three or four Latin Kings standing there with weapons (Sanchez, 2000, 40-43). Unique from other ex-gang members, Bill's sister was responsible for creating a female faction of the male gang Bill was associated with. Mary, Bill's sister, initially created this female gang to hang around with her then boyfriend James. Additional females who associated with Bill's gang were "girls who tagged along [and] carried the guns" (Lee, 1999, 228). These females were welcomed and exploited for sex. The females were also violent and "didn't hesitate to use knives, sharpen combs or fingernails to disfigure their enemies" (Lee, 1999, 129). Each account of female gang membership contradicts or coincides with historical and contemporary research. Klein found that females were criminally involved with male gangs and self-destructive while Decker and Van Winkle found that females only associated with male gangs because they were following their boyfriends.

The gang experience was the transitory product of the social tensions of immigrant youth newly arrived in a hostile city regardless of ethnicity. The ex-gang members in the current research are African American, Hispanic and Asian. The Crip's membership is strictly African American according to Tookie, Monster Kody and Colton. Conversely, there were differences in the ethnic composition of Luis, Reymundo and Bill's gang. The gangs from Bill's neighborhood were all Asian; however, there were two factors of Asian gangs that rivaled one another. These were American-born Chinese Gangs and Foreign-born Chinese Gangs (Lee, 1999). Bill was technically an American-born member but he associated with the Foreign-born gangs because he spoke Chinese fluently. Reymundo found that there were many blacks and whites who were representing Latino gangs because there was strength in numbers and the racial makeup of the neighborhoods was changing.

Contemporary and historical research has included ethnicity, gender and age into the composition of a gang. This has proved to be easy for some researchers and difficult for others.

Regardless, the focus on communities segregated from society includes minorities such as African American, Asian and Hispanic individuals. Historical research included European immigrants, however, the change in time and immigrant demographics have caused for new minorities to become the main focus of the gang. Female gang membership is still an area of research untouched by many sociologists. Ex-gang member's vividly detail how women participated in the gang or the gang's activities in which sociologists can use as a foundation for future research. The concluding census of racial, gender and age composition as told by ex-gang members includes minority youths, but all gangs had female gang counterparts.

## Chapter Four – A Concrete Jungle of Poverty

Gang membership has focused on material wealth and financial security. Most gang members view gang membership as a form of employment, a steady income with limited effort. This has stemmed from the lack of legitimate resources, often turning individuals of lower socioeconomic status with few outlets to turn to illegitimate means. The most compelling stories of economic resources come from ex-gang members and their vast ideas of gaining money fast.

Historical research has found that most gangs form and function as territorial rather than for monetary gain. Contemporary research found that selling drugs was the major source of money and the gang provided protection for drug sellers. The issues start to surface as law enforcement and several researchers create pictures of “super-gangs” functioning as fiends addicted to drugs and prone to violence. Fortunately, new research has proved that this is a significant misunderstanding of many local street gangs and dealing drugs is similar to a job as a cashier at a fast food chain (Venkatesh, 2008). Unfortunately, ex-gang member memoirs told stories of drug addicted gang members selling drugs and committing crimes to keep their habit afloat.

Tookie not only witnessed the effects of drugs on gang members but felt the effects as well. Tookie was selling drugs, as well as using them, with fellow gang members in Los Angeles. He and others soon became addicted to crack cocaine, PCP and “sherm” or cigarettes dipped in acid. This caused a rapid flow of violent and destructive men into the inner city of Los Angeles. Tookie states that these “men believed they could do anything they wanted... the power they hungered for was finally theirs but the drugs produced a fake reality” (Williams, 2004, 204). Before long, gang members were being tossed into jail cells for either drug use or crime induced by drugs.

Colton shares his story as a drug addicted gang member. Within Colton’s gang, the drug trade is popular, but they were also robbing jewelry stores and selling the jewelry for economic gain. After Colton was released from prison, he soon realized that “crack has become the largest



neighborhood business” (Simpson, 2005, 156). He states that “proceeds of robberies and sales of marijuana funded the set... that’s been replaced by crack and carjacking...we still held elders, neighbors, women, children with respect but nowadays elders are seen as easy quick cash” (Simpson, 2005, 302). Colton (Simpson, 2005, 155) recognized the dangers of crack cocaine, not only their sales within the neighborhood but the use among its gang members as well:

In 1989, the U.S. Attorney General describes the Bloods and Crips as the nation’s most powerful crack-trafficking ring, urban terrorists who have achieved dominance in at least forty-seven cities, “due in part to their steady recourse to murderous violence.

Luckily for Colton, he stopped using drugs after his incarceration and he was able to see its dangers of drug use within the gang and the community. Reymundo also realized that the wars between gangs were not about colors or respect, but about drug turf. The Latin Kings were not just a street gang but a drug empire “run by adults who were rarely seen... these people were getting rich while kids were being shot on street corners thinking they were fighting for some honorable cause” (Sanchez, 2000, 232). Luis (Rodriguez, 1993, 8) also realized the dangers of selling and using drugs:

With little productive to do, drug selling becomes a lucrative means of survival. A 10 year-old in Humboldt Park can make \$80-\$100 a day as a lookout for local dealers. The drug trade is business. It’s capitalism: Cutthroat, profit-motivated and expedient. Also, the values which drive gangs are linked to the control of markets, in a way similar to what has created borders between nations. In communities with limited resources like Humboldt Park and East L.A., sophisticated survival structures evolved, including gangs, out of the bone and sinew tossed up by this environment.

Selling drugs and drug use was not the only illegitimate monetary outlet within the gang. Bill was known to gamble in order to have a steady income. Gambling consisted of cards, dice and games. The most interesting economic resource for Bill was gambling with men outside the gang in pool halls for quick and easy cash. The only thing important to Bill was gambling as the

lure of drugs and alcohol were never attracting. In order to numb his feelings, Bill would wager instead of dabbling in drugs and alcohol (Lee, 1999, 83). Gambling was also a way of socializing in the Chinese culture. According to Bill, “our parents and relatives served as role models, exposing us to *Mah Jong*, *Pai Gow*, *Fan Tan* and other games as an appropriate form of recreation”(Lee, 1999, 84). Bill was raised to believe that gambling was macho and risk-taking, compared to other ex-gang members who believed drugs and alcohol were normal occurrences and violence was considered macho and risk-taking. Gambling encompassed manhood in Asian culture and represented a rite of passage.

Different from other ex-gang members, Reymundo was required to give five dollars a week to the gang. Each member in the gang was required to “donate five dollars a week (called weekly dues), which was used to purchase guns, large amounts of drugs, and bond money for members who got arrested” (Sanchez, 2000, 140). Some of the money was also used for members who were incarcerated for crimes they committed on behalf of the gang.

Gang members commit illegal activities for financial gain depending upon their culture, organizational structure, rules and codes of conduct. Historical studies have found that drug trafficking is a secondary activity to gang membership and identity while contemporary studies have found that drug trafficking was only common in a small percentage of street gangs. Conversely, the memoirs of ex-gang members share tales of extreme violence and criminality as a result of drug use. There are other activities such as gambling and robbery, but the main source of money comes from drug sales, contradicting historical and contemporary research and causing the “super-gangs” defined by law enforcement to seem more real than exaggerated.

## Chapter Five – Kill or be Killed

Historical research tended to overestimate the level of gang delinquency, while contemporary research has diluted the amount of gang delinquency. This has caused a serious misinterpretation of street gangs in large cities across the United States. Are gangs as dangerous and violent as the media and historical research has declared? Or, is a new era of gangs more prone to drug use, hanging out on street corners and playing sports? The situation has caused confusion and frustration between sociologists, law enforcement and media. Accounts told by ex-gang members only heighten this confusion and frustration as their stories continue to feed to the media and law enforcement hype of “super-gangs” and their violent ways.

Thrasher believed that thrills and excitement were the main reasons for delinquent activities while Shaw and McKay believed that ineffectiveness of the family, lack of unity and value systems, poverty, instability, and lack of employment opportunities create delinquent youth. Most ex-gang members would agree with Thrasher and Shaw and McKay. Toookie was raised by his grandparents when his unstable mother signed over custody. Colton’s mother was dating many men, doing drugs and beating her children, causing an instable family. Colton was soon adopted by his grandparents and raised in Los Angeles. Monster Kody’s parents remained married during his childhood but he was the youngest of several children and was neglected. Reymundo was raped by an older cousin in Puerto Rico. His mother re-married and moved the family to the United States. After a few years, his mother divorced his step-father and the family moved back to Puerto Rico, leaving Reymundo behind because he was “too much to deal with” (Sanchez, 2000, 12). Reymundo lived on the streets and with gang members. Luis’s story was similar to Reymundo in which he ran away from home and lived on the streets most of his adolescence. Bill’s father was involved in the Chinese Underworld in San Francisco and was also doing drugs and became very violent towards his mother and two sisters. Each story has a similar background of family dysfunction in a poverty stricken neighborhood with instability and lack of unity and value systems.

Cloward and Ohlin sought to explain deviance by youth who found opportunities for advancement by illegitimate means. This was common in many ex-gang member memoirs. Colton noticed that many gang members were selling drugs as a survival tactic in order to “get paper” or money. Another portion of Colton’s neighborhood consisted of “jackers” or someone who made money by grand theft auto, burglary or robbery (Simpson, 2005, 38). Similar to Tookie’s “prey and predator” theory, Colton noticed that “when a gang decides we’re tough so we’re going to move, it becomes predatory... the true predators clique up” and commit crimes together (Simpson, 2005, xviii). As a means for income, Colton sold marijuana in school and began “grabbing purses from people leaving the bank”. The gang was a criminal enterprise “just like everything else in America, you start small, work hard, and business expands... you invest your capital so your business grows... if you stay focused and are smart, you move up the ladder” (Simpson, 2005, 31). Colton believed the gang was similar to a business in America and the only way to inquire an income was to become delinquent. Monster Kody admits that he was engaged in criminality, but his “activity gravitated around a survival instinct: kill or be killed” (Shakur, 1993, 131).

Short and Strodbeck recognized that it is an exposure to risk that explains why one member of a gang may be more or less violent than another member. Certain risks are created when an individual decides to join a gang because the norms of the group are different than society’s norms. Short and Strodbeck categorized deviant behavior into corner-boy delinquents, lower class social and sexual delinquents, and non-retreatist conventional delinquents. Corner-boy delinquents consisted of gambling, signifying, hanging, drinking, fighting and making money illegally. The corner-boy delinquents also involve truancy and heterosexual intercourse and are organized with regular club meetings. Lower class social and sexual delinquents are groups that play cards (not for money), dance, drink, party and heterosexual intercourse but are less formally organized than corner-boy delinquents. Non-retreatist conventional delinquents attend school and

team athletics and are more traditionally involved in middle class activities but do drink, use drugs and commit delinquent activities.

Each deviant category defined by Short and Strodtbeck are compatible with an ex-gang member. Tookie is considered a corner-boy delinquent. Tookie was actively involved in signifying when he created the Crips and adopted blue bandanas as a symbol of the gang, as well as certain hand signals and chants to represent different sets within the Crips gang. Drinking, using drugs and fighting were common within Tookie's gang as well. Tookie did attend school, however, "during school days we'd meet and plan the day, foolishly sacrificing an education for forbidden fruits of drugs, unprotected sex, fighting, strong-arming, and gambling" (Williams, 2004, 69). Luis was thirteen years old and was "already tattooed, already sexually involved, already into drugs" (Rodriquez, 1993, 48). Luis would be associated with the lower class social and sexual delinquents because his gang was not as organized as Tookie's gang. While Tookie's gang committed deviant acts of violence and robbery for economic purposes, Luis states that "nothing would have come of any of this, we were bored" (Rodriquez, 1993, 95). Finally, Bill fits the last group of non-retreatist conventional delinquents. During his youth, Bill would hang out, get into fights, listen to music, and tease girls and snuck peeks at Playboy centerfolds (Lee, 1999, 71). However, Bill would be a non-retreatist conventional delinquent because he graduated high school with honors, went to San Francisco State University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology.

Hagedorn's study of delinquent activity as mainly partying and hanging out and the only reason for criminal activity was fighting for territory. Hagedorn also noted that conflict between authorities and gang members creates hostility between the two entities. The stories of ex-gang members made Hagedorn's theory of conflict between authority and gang members apparent. After being apprehended by the police, the officers asked what gang Luis was associated with. Luis told the police he was part of a set within the Latin Kings and the police took him to a rival gang neighborhood. Luis claims "they forced me and my friends to spray paint over the graffiti

with our own insignias – as rival gang members watched – and then left us there to find out way home” (Rodriquez, 1993, 9). The brutal police practice seems to be unrealistic; however, it is a common police practice that has been fueling the fires of rival gang warfare. Most ex-gang members also viewed the police department as another rival gang.

Drug use and abuse is the most common delinquent act found in both historical and contemporary research and in ex-gang member memoirs. The crack cocaine epidemic reached its peak in the mid-1980s and has had law enforcement and sociologists trying to help decrease the amount of sales and use. This is because drug sales and distribution also entails violence and feeds the rivalry between gangs. The distinction between drug gangs and street gangs has warped over time causing law enforcement and the general public fearing for their safety. Klein notes that drug gangs and street gangs are clearly different. Drug gangs have a distinct hierarchical leadership, strong group cohesiveness, a code of loyalty and secrecy, and the avoidance of independent drug sales. On the contrary, street gangs lack almost all of these requirements and even promote individual and independent drug sales between its members. The ex-gang members were part of street gangs and not drug gangs. Colton detailed the effects of gang members using PCP, altering their perception of reality and causing members to “rob stores in daylight and not trying to avoid the police or bystanders”. There were also tales of Colton’s peers confessing to crimes they did not commit because they were under the influence of drugs and shooting at bystanders for no reason (Simpson, 2005, 71). When Colton became drug and alcohol free, he realized that drugs allowed him to misconstrue reality and distort logical thinking. Luis also admitted to trying “all kinds of pills, with mescaline and meth” (Rodriquez, 1993, 125). Tookie told stories of how he was constantly strung out on “sherm”, a deadly mix of cigarettes dipped in PCP, while Luis explains how “sniffing” became his favorite activity involving the inhalation of carbon, paint or gasoline out of a paper bag or on a rag (Williams, 2004, 103; Rodriquez, 1993, 102). Historical and contemporary research specifically notes that drug use is not tolerated by the gang. This contradicts every account of ex-gang members. Reymundo explained that there was a

notebook all Latin King and Queens must follow in order to participate in the gang. Drugs laws were enforced in the notebook and Reymundo found it “funny reading laws regarding drug use while sitting there with a joint in my mouth”. Reymundo confronted other members about the drug laws and was told that the drug laws were made to “avoid junkies being part of the gang...control your high and not become addicted, especially to narcotics” (Sanchez, 2000, 124). Tookie also denounced the use of drugs within the Crips and lived by the motto “do as I say, not as I do”.

A common delinquency theme among the ex-gang members was retaliation. Retaliation feeds violence within gangs and coincides with contemporary research regarding issues of respect. Monster Kody felt a sense of duty to his gang after the attendance of a funeral for a member. Revenge was the only way to settle a death of a comrade but it “does not always constitute shooting someone, thought this was the ultimate...anything from wallbanging (writing your set name on a wall, advertising) to spitting on someone to fighting” (Shakur, 1993, 52). Colton also discussed retaliation as a defensive move in gang warfare and a reaction to settle disputes between rival gangs. Retaliation is a vicious cycle in which fighting and murder are constantly committed. The death of a friend encourages a normal individual to avoid the same fate and drop out of a gang, however, for gang members it increases participation. Colton believed that “the more enemies I eliminate, the more stores I rob, the bigger my reputation, the greater the proof of my invincibility and, thus, the odds of my continued existence” (Simpson, 2005, 151). The harassment Reymundo and his gang dealt with on a daily basis by members of the community and the police caused him to retaliate. Reymundo and his gang decided to rob and burglarize homes and cars in the neighborhood as well as tagging (graffiti) the gang’s symbol over buildings. Reymundo admits now that “it didn’t dawn on me at the time that the damage we did was to our own community” (Sanchez, 2000, 98). Retaliation also went as far as firebombing houses of rival gang members. This meant that family members were now targets for gang retaliation (Rodriquez, 1993, 118). Contemporary research believes that respect is closely tied to

whether a person will be violent. A gang member must be willing to fight back and “payback” for what the rival gang did to them.

Anderson found that “staging areas”, or hangouts where wide mixes of people gather for various reasons, was a foundation of gang violence and where respect is most often waged (1999, 76-79). The “staging areas” Anderson defined was found in all ex-gang member memoirs. The “staging areas” consisted of parks, juvenile camps, prisons and schools. Colton found that juvenile “camp is just a different battlefield, a new place to further my reputation of danger and bring a sense of security” (Simpson, 2005, 32). When Colton returned from juvenile camp he discovered that the time spent away in camp only solidified his reputation by proving he was committed to the gang and a true gangster. The Rosecrans Skating Rink was the “staging area” for Monster Kody and his gang. The skating rink was where “everybody who was somebody in the gang world went to further promote their name and set” (Shakur, 1993, 18). Luis dropped out of high school during the first year, leaving a lot of time on his hands to roam around the neighborhood. Luis and his friends began to hitchhiking throughout East Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley pretending to be incoming students at local high schools for the day. School officials believed the teenagers and allowed them to attend school in which Luis and his friends represented their gang, sold drugs and met girls (Rodriquez, 1993, 126). Clemente High School was “nothing more than a hunting ground” and the students were prey for Reymundo (Sanchez, 2000, 103). Gang related violence escalated at Clemente because of gang warfare and Latin Kings like Reymundo were only concerned about gang affiliations, searching for any sign that someone was part of a rival gang for an excuse to fight other students. These signs can constitute anything from the color of a student’s clothing to marks on their notebooks. Reymundo admitted that his “sole purpose” for attending school was to gangbang (Sanchez, 2000, 166-167).

Aside from historical and contemporary research, ex-gang members committed an array of delinquent activities. Assault, attempted murder and murder were common acts of violence committed by gang members. Colton stated that “every member gotta fight, stab, shoot, and



whatever it takes to destroy the enemy...we're at war with the Bloods... it's them or us and whatever you do, you can't be a buster (coward)" (Simpson, 2005, 19). Colton (Simpson, 2005, 27) did not feel regret or guilt for any of his actions:

The feeling of guilt passes. It's like being a virgin. The first time, you're swept with emotions, but the next time you know how to prevent guilt and shame from overwhelming you. After a while, the conflict is not there and the behavior becomes second nature. My guilt remains something to be brushed away. After all, somebody is out to get me. Somebody violated the code on the streets. I'm a Crip, You're a Blood. I see you. I'm going to kill you. You see me; you're going to kill me. I'm not ready to die so I'm going to kill you first. It's all business. There it is; war.

Self-preservation was not at stake for many of the ex-gang members. Murder was frequent and victims were usually the ones who looked like the gang members. Luis states that murder happened often and "they're killing themselves, over and over" by attacking gangs of the same ethnicity (Rodriquez, 1993, 9). Monster Kody also recognized the frequency of murder during a conversation with a fellow gang member, Killer. During the conversation, Killer told Monster Kody about killing a rival gang member. Monster Kody noticed that "Killer was speaking as if he were simply telling me my shoe was untied... murders were that commonplace" (Shakur, 1993, 131).

Less serious crimes were also committed by the ex-gang members. Delinquency for the younger members of Luis's gang constituted acts such as shoplifting from record stores, super markets, gas stations and fast food restaurants. The items were almost always food, alcohol or entertainment items and the items were consumed for the gang's purposes only and not for profit. Older gang members committed acts for profit such as stealing bikes from neighborhoods, burglary and armed robbery (Rodriquez, 1993, 74-75). Bill and his fellow gang members sold fireworks for profit in Chinatown.

The only account of sexual assaults given by ex-gang members was from Reymundo's neighborhood. Desolately, rapes were considered a common circumstance in Reymundo's barrio, starting as isolated incidents but soon turning into signified attacks as a distorted sense of power (Sanchez, 2000, 121). Reymundo believed the rapes were not committed by gang members until he recounted a frustrating night where he could not find a girl that would have sexual intercourse with him and forced himself on his girlfriend. Sexual assault such as rape may be a common delinquent activity among gang members but historical and contemporary research has failed to recognize this issue. Ex-gang members have also failed to recognize this deviant act aside from Reymundo.

Deviance and gang membership go hand-in-hand. As a gang member, it is near impossible to not commit an act of deviance during membership. These acts can be as victimless as drug use, shoplifting or graffiti. There were also heinous acts committed such as murder and assault. These acts were considered only a part of gang warfare and not a common happening. Most ex-gang members rationalize murder and assault as a way to survive, the "kill or be killed" mentality.

## **Chapter Six – My Loyalty, My Life, My Pride, My Gang**

There is a clear organizational component to all street gangs found in both historical and contemporary research. Organization ranged from a hierarchy of leadership to the organization of economic resources and delinquent activities. The organization of the gang also revolves around the community in which the gang is situated. Ex-gang members detailed their hierarchy and their effects on the community in which they controlled.

The ex-gang member memoirs all began their discussion of hierarchy and leadership with their initiation into the gang. Tookie detailed the brutal three minute beating he endured in order to become part of a local street gang. Colton, Monster Kody and Reymundo all found this type of imitation commonplace. Bill only loosely associated with the local gang in Chinatown and Luis formed his group from childhood friendships, lacking any type of initiation for these two ex-gang members.

After initiation into the gang, each ex-gang member was given a duty and learned the hierarchy of the gang. Tookie quickly climbed the ranks in his small, localized gang. In Tookie's case, leadership was gained by personality; the most dominate male was the unspoken leader. Tookie's leadership mirrored Miller's theory who observed three types of leadership styles, one being the "key-personality" model in which the individual with the strongest personality is deemed the leader and the other members fall in behind the leader (1981, 297). After Tookie became leader of his small set, he formed with another leader on the west side of Los Angeles in order to form the Crips. Bonded by a commonality of low socioeconomic status, the Crips became Tookie's family. Tookie "placed the Crips above and beyond all else" and strived to make "Crip" and "Tookie" a synonymous name (Williams, 2004, 106). Tookie formed the Crips as a way to consolidate the friends and acquaintances he had made over the past few years. Learning from other mistakes made by gang leaders, Tookie realized that the "divide-and-conquer" technique did not work. According to Tookie, "it didn't take a mathematician to see that

when a structure is divided into factions, each individual loses its potency and thus is exposed to possible annihilation” (Williams, 2004, 83).

The set Monster Kody associated with was small, consisting of approximately seventy-five to eighty people. Today, sets can encompass up to a thousand people. Monster Kody noted different positions from foot soldiers who sold drugs on the streets to recruiters who encouraged young members of the community to join the gang to O.G.’s, or original gangster, who were leaders of the sets. There were three stages of reputation one must go through before the title of O.G. described by Monster Kody (Shakur, 1993, 14-15):

1. You must build the reputation of your name, i.e., you as an individual;
2. You must build your name in association with your particular set, so that when your name is spoke your set is also spoken of in the same breath, for it is synonymous; and
3. You must establish yourself as a promoter of Crip or Blood, depending, of course, on which side of the color bar you live.

Gangbanging was a full time occupation and most members strive for professionalism. According to Monster Kody, “banging falls short on the level of organization of an institution that was formally founded on the premise of being structured, so there is no compartmentalization” (Shakur, 1993, 78). There were no specific duties assigned to gang members and a serious gangbanger could find himself juggling several jobs at once. In the case of Monster Kody, he found jobs such as “minister of information, which included such responsibilities as writing on walls, declaring who we were and who we wanted to kill, and verbalizing our intent at gangland supremacy on street corners, on busses, in school yards, and at parties; minister of defense, which entailed organizing and overseeing general troop movement and maintain a highly visible, militarily able to contingency of soldiers who, at a moment’s notice, could be relied upon for rapid deployment anywhere in the city; teach of war tactics, which I guess, would fall under the heading of instructor; and combat soldier and on-the-job trainer” (Shakur, 1993, 78-79). In

addition to these duties, all gang members were obligated to represent their allegiance to their sets. These sets “function like the different divisions of the U.S. Army”. Monster Kody uses this analogy for a person who is enlisted in the Army and belongs to “the First Infantry Division, 196<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, Second Battalion, Delta Company”. A member of a gang might belong to the West Side Crips, Eight Tray Gangsters, North Side Eighty-third Street, or West Side Harvard Park Brims, Sixty-second street” (Shakur, 1993, 79). The complexity of both organizations can be seen through Monster Kody’s analogy as each various division and chapter noted by initials or abbreviations.

Colton described the gang’s hierarchy similarly to Monster Kody, using the United States military as a correspondence. Colton discusses the gang as a large society divided by race and nationality. According to Colton, each race has a different “clique, and each clique has its own army with foot soldiers, sergeants, lieutenants, captains, enforcers, stabilizers, and generals” (Simpson, 2005, 97).

Colton and Monster Kody feed the gang hierarchy stereotype created by police departments across the United States. Most police departments believe gangs are structured as bureaucratic pyramid with “chiefs” on the top, “lieutenants” and “privates” who are on the bottom. A sociological perception of gang hierarchy sharply contradicts this, believing that the group is an “age-graded model” (Hagedorn, 1988; Thrasher, 1927). Within this model, each gang has a “main group” with its leaders and “wannabes”. The members transition from “junior” to “senior” through a process of age. Luis found this type of model most common in his gang where clubs of young boys developed into Tribes as they aged. Luis defined “pewees” as the youngest of the set. The “pewees” would stand outside Tribe meetings, restricted to enter until they gained more experience as a gang member (Rodriquez, 1993, 52). Reymundo (Sanchez, 2000, 145) also witnessed this type of structure within the Latin Kings:

- (1) Pewee Kings – very young members, usually 8-12 years old.

- (2) Juniors – young members, usually 13-15 years old
- (3) Kings – adolescents, usually 16 and older with no clear cut off of age to be a King.  
Most of the older Kings end up as leaders
- (4) Leaders – there was a leader for the Pewee's, Juniors and the Kings for each small subgroup of the Latin Kings. There were also leaders of the entire Latin Kings for the Chicago set

Again, Colton contradicts sociological perceptions of gang hierarchy. While most sociologists believe in the “age-graded” model where members gain status and rank based upon their age described by both Luis and Reymundo, Colton (Simpson, 205, 137) details how gang members in his set gained status and rank:

Then, Big T's little brother, Li'l T, is arrested for the murder of a Crip from Eight Tray Hoover. Li'l T had been a rider. With this charge of murder, he's climbed another notch. Each level of participation brings points, an upgrade in rank and status. Now he'll have to pass a series of other tests in the Crip Module, and then in prison. When he passes, he'll have climbed further.

Colton also described the gang as a “car”. This was a unique analogy where the gang was considered a car because it was a complete machine where the engine was the O.G. and the wheels were the soldiers (Simpson, 2005, 131).

The Chinese Underworld encompasses a different type of hierarchy compared to the street gangs the ex-gang members were involved in. Bill associated with the Tongs, which translates to a meeting hall or club in Chinese. There were different societies within the Chinese Underworld or *Hock Sair Woey* such as the Tirads and smaller organized street gangs. The Tirads have a reported membership of more than 50,000 in the Chinese Underworld (Lee, 1999, 69). The gangs in Bill's neighborhood were also separated by Foreign-born gangs and American-born

gangs. The leadership style in Bill's gang coincides with Miller's "key-personality" model where elders were respected and considered leaders.

Unexpectedly, the community was not discussed in most of the ex-gang member memoirs. Sociologists believe that the community plays an important part in the gang's function. Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin found that gangs have become entrenched in their communities as a byproduct of the "working-class". The community is also responsible for the segregation and desegregation of gangs. Most communities rely on the gang for protection and financial reassurance found in Venkatesh's study of Chicago's Black Disciples. Tookie's community supported the gang to a certain extent by not giving away information to the police. Colton and Monster Kody believed the gang was an important part of the community in which they provided protection because most police would not help in times of need. Reymundo believed the police were just "another gang in the barrio" and the community felt the same way because of racial discrimination. Luis's account of the community's reaction to the gang was the only one that differed from other ex-gang members. The community where Luis lived responded to the issue of gangs by starting "committees, task forces, community centers, born-again storefront churches and behavior guidance counselors proliferated" in South San Gabriel (Rodriquez, 1993, 112). Interestingly, the community fought to rid of the gangs such as the gang Luis associated with.

Vertical gangs, or gangs who regenerated over decades within a community, were discussed in Klein's research. Vertical gangs symbolize a type of fraternity the member's grandfather or father participated in and considered a rite of passage. This type of gang was prevalent in Tookie, Colton and Monster Kody's stories. Stories of families who had parents' involved in the gang were not uncommon; however, Tookie, Colton and Monster Kody's families were not involved in the gang, going as far as fighting against their child's involvement in the gang. Each new generation of Crip and Blood gang members develop a more complex system, reaching institutional proportions. Monster Kody noted that "this type of participation in the development and expansion of these groups', mores, customs, and philosophies that gangbanging

will never be stopped” from outside organizations including the community and law enforcement because most communities support the gang and involve the family (Shakur, 1993, 79).

The underlying issue in each ex-gang members’ memoir was the community’s response to the gang. Sociological research have either blamed the community for creating the gang, found in historical research such as Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin, or the research victimized the community in more contemporary research such as Anderson and Venkatesh. Ex-gang members contradicted each other as well, claiming they were protecting their community and the community would stand up for them, while others noticed the community’s intervention and prevention techniques to disband the gang. The hierarchy of each gang also contradicted one another. While Colton and Monster Kody used analogies such as the military to explain the gang’s hierarchy, Reymundo, Bill and Luis detailed how older members were considered the respected leaders. Other ex-gang members found that becoming leader was exemplified by the “key-personality” model described by Miller.



## **Conclusion**

Analyzing historical and contemporary research has resulted in a clear understanding that there are constant contradictions throughout the history of the study of gangs. No sociological perception is more accurate than the next, regardless if the study is more quantitative or qualitative in nature. The historical research has provided a concrete foundation to the study of gangs while contemporary research has built upon this foundation in an attempt to build a stable structure. Unfortunately, the structure is weak and constantly altered by newer research.

The assumption for the constant contradictions in the study of gangs revolves around the type of study. Quantitative studies such as Short and Strodtbeck provide answers that are clear-cut and categorized with few distinctions between each category. The survey used in Short and Strodtbeck's study categorized the gang's deviance and member participation. Each response was labeled and categorized, leaving no room for interpretation or difference in individuality. On the other hand, qualitative research provided more room for interpretation on behalf of both the gang member and the researcher. Venkatesh conducted interviews with gang members of the Black Disciples and gained knowledge from both his observations and the gang member's responses. Participant observation was also conducted by Chambliss, Anderson and Sanchez-Jankowski. This type of research leaves a lot of discretion in the hands of the researcher when deciding what to include in the study or how to interpret an individual's actions. The constant contradictions in research stem from the methodology of research rather than the type of information collected during the study. Relying on ex-gang member memoirs alone is not enough. Proven in Venkatesh's study, most gang members will purposely exaggerate when given an outsider information about gang life whether they are representing the gang, trying to instill fear in others or glorify gang life in order to recruit members. While this is assumed to be the reason behind constantly altering sociological perceptions of gangs, it cannot be labeled the only reason.

Defining a gang has proved to be a difficult task between historical and contemporary research. Most definitions provide details about the gang members such as adolescent, minority

and males. Other definitions include location and illegal activities of the gang members. A few research studies have developed definitions that accommodated law enforcement's view of antisocial, violent groups that are the cause of all crime in large cities. Contemporary research has found that most gangs are in competition over scarce resources and view the gang as a competitive advantage over others in the neighborhood. The reason for altering definitions depends on the type of gangs studied, location and if the sociologists are feeding law enforcement's agenda. Ex-gang members definition changed based on how they relied on the gang. While some gang members relied on the gang for financial security, others found solace in the family support the gang provided.

The theoretical explanations surrounding gangs is focused on responses to the community and are based on either delinquent acts, group process or disorganized communities. The historical theoretical paradigm of gangs includes strain theory, control theory and subculture theory. Contemporary theories used to understand and describe gangs include labeling theory, social disorganization and organizational theory. These theories also provide illustrations of gangs and their group process. Each theory has its own strength and weakness when describing group process, however, all theories are indicative of theories about delinquency and not gangs per se. Although these theories can account for gangs as a whole that support delinquency, they cannot account for the behavior of the individuals within the gang, the behavior of the gang as a collective and why some gangs persist while others decline and die.

Becoming a gang member is a unique and difficult process frequently studied by historical and contemporary sociologists. Historical studies theorized that gangs are formed from "play-groups" of immigrant youth who are adjusting to life in a disorganized community. The immigrant youth create their own subculture in response to a disorganized community. The youth are forced to join and stay in the gang in order to survive in their community. The gang will persist as long as the needs of the individual are being met. The "distinct lower class value system" is also discussed in historical research. The lower class value system clashes with the

middle class value system and causes gang formation and membership. Contemporary research began to fade away from the idea of a subculture created in response to a disorganized community and began to focus more on the issue of racial segregation. Contemporary studies believed that gangs are formed from “play-groups” as well, eventually forming into street gangs. Contrasting historical studies, contemporary research has found that the gang plays a large role in the financial security of its members. The studies have all shown that there are a multitude of factors either pushing or pulling an individual into gang membership. Research using participant observation may have a harder time understanding why an individual has joined a gang, while research that includes interviews with gang members may have an easier time talking to the gang member about their individual reasons. This was apparent when reading ex-gang member memoirs, comparing it to ethnographic research. When the gang member is willing to detail the individual reasons behind gang membership, a more clear and complete picture can be formed regarding this issue. Researchers who have silenced the participants of their research have found unclear reasons.

Gangs have occurred in various locations composing several ethnicities and can include males or females. Historical research has focused on young Caucasian immigrant males, but more historical research has included female gangs, older members who are considered “original gangsters” and gangs of different ethnicities. One theory behind this change is that as immigrant groups moved out of the slums, new immigrants moved in composing of different ethnicities. Several studies did not include ethnicity, gender or age and described a distinction between members in general. These were considered “fringe” members who loosely associate with the gang and “core” members who are consistent members committing most of the crime in the gang. The biggest debate among historical and contemporary sociologists consists of female gangs. Historical studies claimed that females were not members and only dating gang members, which provides them with a loose association to the gang. Contemporary research found that there are two sets of a gang, female and male sets. The females are just as violent and criminally prone as

the males. Finally, there is a constant debate as to whether the females are used as sex toys for gang members or a war tactic to intrude on rival gangs. The change in immigrant demographic has a lot of bearing on the difference between historical and contemporary research regarding racial composition of the gang. The time era weighs heavily on the study of female gang members, noting that most historical studies did not mention females either involved in a gang or associating with a male gang. Contemporary research has noticed the problems when including the gang's composition of gender and ethnicity and has taken a different path by defining and labeling individuals involved in the gang based on personality. Gender of gang members is still a widely unpublished area of study and newer research needs to take this into account.

Membership and gang formation begin with the lack of legitimate resources, causing many sociologists to wonder what legal and illegal economic resources are used. Thrasher and other historical sociologist found that gangs are not motivated by monetary gain. Contemporary research has found that street gangs are entrepreneurially motivated and the foundation of their gang revolves around illicit sales of substances, arms, women and chronic gambling. The illicit sales of drugs are the most profitable in all contemporary gangs studied. Conversely, other studies have found that the sale of drugs is not as profitable as one may believe and the definition of law enforcement's "super gangs" is far from taking over the underground economy. Economic activity of the gang is important to study because this can change the definition of a gang regarding criminal activity and membership. Unfortunately, gang members and their economic resources are constantly understudied in both historical and contemporary research. Once again, time era plays a role in the difference between historical and contemporary research. Research during eras of depression or war will have different findings of material and financial accumulation within gangs. When legitimate resources are blocked, illegitimate resources are sought out. The stories of ex-gang members are the perfect example of this issue. Ex-gang members who were members during the 1960s and 1970s all describe how factories were closing in large cities, causing unemployment rates to skyrocket. Joining the gang was a way to provide

an income when jobs were scarce. On the other hand, contemporary studies in the 1990s found that modes of financial accumulation were not sought after when a member joined the gang.

The overestimation of gang delinquency is partially due to the media hype gangs have received over the past few years. Historical sociologists have done the same, integrating violent and heinous acts of crime into the group process. Contemporary research has found that acts of violence, while they occur do not occur as frequently as past researchers have theorized. The activities occur as part of youthful thrills and excitements such as vandalizing buildings and drug use, not underestimating their propensity to violence due to territorial confrontations and rival gangs. This causes a debate between law enforcement, sociologists and the media.

The organizational structure of a gang has been the most stable sociological perspective of gangs with a clear change in historical and contemporary research. Historical research believed gangs were formed spontaneously with some form of hierarchy while contemporary research proposes respect, survival and leadership as the groups' establishment and underpinning. The only clear reason for this change is found in law enforcement's recent agendas disengage local street gangs and the media's hype concerning violence caused by local street gangs.

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